

DR. JOHN S. BARNETT

LIVING
HOPE
FOR THE
END OF DAYS

A 52-WEEK
DEVOTIONAL
FROM THE
BOOK OF REVELATION

FOREWORD BY JOHN MACARTHUR

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Dedication

This book is gratefully dedicated to:

Melvina Helen Dobias Barnett (my mother)—
who taught me to READ God's Word;

Robert L. Barnett, Sr. (my father)—
who taught me to STUDY God's Word;

Dr. Stewart Custer (my seminary professor)—
who taught me to UNDERSTAND God's Word;

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who taught me to LIVE God's Word;

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who taught me to PREACH God's Word;

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Foreword

No book in Scripture reveals the glory of God and Christ in more splendor than does the book of Revelation. Yet no book has been more misunderstood, misinterpreted, and neglected than this book. At the end of the book, Revelation 22:10 says, *“Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.”* Clearly, God wants His children to know what this book teaches, so that they can appropriate its truth to their lives.

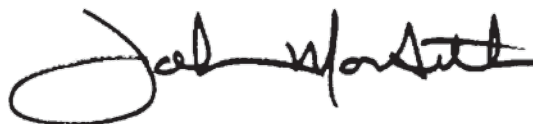
Those who read Revelation and heed its message will be greatly blessed. In fact, it is the only book in the New Testament that begins and ends with a promise of blessing to its readers. In Revelation 1:3, we find, *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it.* And at the end of the book, (22:7), a similar promise is given: *“Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.”* Those who ignore Revelation deprive themselves of a rich treasure of divine truth, and the promised blessings that come from understanding that truth.

Far from being the mysterious, incomprehensible book many imagine it to be, Revelation’s purpose is to reveal truth, not to obscure it. That fact is evident in its title, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” which primarily refers to our Lord’s second-coming glory. The Greek word for *revelation* could also be translated, “an uncovering,” “an unveiling,” or “a disclosure.” It is used in the New Testament to speak of the disclosure of spiritual truth (Romans 16:25; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 1:17; 3:3), the manifestation of the sons of God (Romans 8:19), and the advent of Christ at both His first (Luke 2:32) and second (2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7) comings. In each case, the word “revelation” describes something (or someone) that was formerly hidden, but has now become visible. Thus the book of Revelation unveils truths about Jesus Christ and His final victory, which were alluded to but not fully disclosed in earlier portions of Scripture.

Because this book is first and foremost about Jesus Christ, its focus is inherently devotional. The book depicts Christ as the risen, glorified Son of God ministering among the churches (1:10ff.) *as the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth* (1:5), as *“the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End”* (1:8), as the one *“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”* (1:8), as *“the First and the Last”* (1:11), as *the Son of Man* (1:13), as the one *“who was dead, [but now is]...alive forevermore”* (1:18), as *the Son of God* (2:18), as the one *“who is holy [and]...true”* (3:7), as *“the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation*

of God" (3:14), as "*the Lion of the tribe of Judah*" (5:5), as the Lamb in heaven, with authority to open the title deed to the earth (6:1ff.), as the Lamb on the throne (7:17), as the Messiah who will reign forever (11:15), as *The Word of God* (19:13), as the majestic King of kings and Lord of lords, returning in glorious splendor to conquer His foes (19:11ff.), and as "*the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star*" (22:16). Because of its Christ-centered focus, the book of Revelation fuels worship, motivates holiness, and cultivates hope, which is why its message is so desperately needed today.

In *Living Hope for the End of Days*, John Barnett has made the book of Revelation accessible to anyone, casting it in a wonderful, manageable set of daily devotions. These devotions will do far more than merely pique your curiosity about the book's remarkable imagery. They will serve to enrich both your worship and your walk by prompting you to focus on the central figure of Revelation, Christ Himself. So dig in on a regular basis to this mighty treasury that exalts the glory of our Lord.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

—John MacArthur

Special Thanks...

*To my Bonnie who typed day and night, edited countless versions,
captured all of my thoughts onto paper, and stayed with me
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received these words as my weekly exhortations from the pulpit.*

An Overview of the Book of Revelation

In Revelation 1—find living hope for the end of days in the majesty of Jesus as He is today. FEEL the apostle John's lonely, forsaken, and painful exile on Patmos. See how his face-to-face meeting with the risen Christ breathes hope into his life—and ours. What Christ did, He still does. What John needed, we still need. What Jesus said, we still hear. **FEEL hope in Christ!**

In Revelation 2 and 3—find living hope for the end of days in the message Jesus gives to us. LISTEN across the pages of history as Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor whisper words of hope as we face similar struggles. Although our struggles may be in different forms, God's words of hope still apply. **LISTEN to His Word!**

In Revelation 4 and 5—find living hope for the end of days in the worship of Jesus that we share in today. WORSHIP is the atmosphere of heaven. The throne of God is the center of the universe. The saints who step into eternity soon kneel at Christ's feet. Get in step with God; join the saints and angels, and feel the majesty of worshiping the Lamb. **WORSHIP as you kneel before Him!**

In Revelation 6-9, 16, and 19—find living hope for the end of days in the return of the real King, Jesus. WATCH as the long-withheld wrath of God breaks out. Sin is judged. Mankind is decimated. Civilizations vanish. Imprisoned monsters run wild. Evil goes unrestrained. And then Christ comes: His eyes ablaze, His Words unleashed, and His feet once again standing on earth. **WATCH for Christ's return!**

In Revelation 10-15—find living hope for the end of days in the mysteries Jesus reveals. PONDER the mysteries of God's plan in conquering evil and taking back the Father's world. Countering every nefarious attack of that old serpent, Satan, Christ's truth is unleashed. Nothing surprises Christ. Nothing impedes Jesus. Nothing limits His perfect plan. Whatever life brings, God is providentially weaving His good handiwork into the fabric of our lives. **PONDER God's mysteries!**

In Revelation 17—find living hope for the end of days in meeting the true bride Christ calls out. REMEMBER that we who love Jesus are also engaged to be married to Him. In this chapter we see the stark contrast between the false harlot of religion and the true bride of faith in Christ. As deceptions abound, as false teachings multiply, and as religion replaces the revelation from God through His Word, nothing is more vital than the truth. **REMEMBER the truth!**

In Revelation 18—find living hope for the end of days in the true riches Christ gives. MEASURE your true wealth by what you have invested in heaven. As Christ reveals the coming meltdown of human civilization, He shows us that our real worth is found in what remains after losing our health, wealth, prosperity, possessions, and power. We must be sure that we are invested in the “stocks” that we know will survive the collapse. **MEASURE true wealth!**

In Revelation 20 through 22—find living hope for the end of days in the mansions Jesus has prepared for us. WAIT until you see what God has planned for us! It is out of this world! The curse is restrained. Sinners are eternally judged. And heaven’s gates are finally opened. These concluding chapters in Revelation embody every promise God has made. For the answer to the problems of mankind, the end of suffering, and the joys of heaven, here is God’s final Word. **WAIT with hope!**

Introduction

Living Hope for the End of Days!

Almost daily we face the warning signs of sin's rampage through the human race, and there are days when life is indeed gloomy! When Paul foresaw life at the end of time, he warned us that it was going to be bad. Listen to his sobering words across the centuries:

... In the last days perilous 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).

Once we get into eschatological things (things related to the end of the world or the events associated with it), we are in the realm of the Bible in which we should not be dogmatic. Rather, it should cause us to study even further, and have forbearance with differing opinions. The greatest Christian minds of all time have studied the future. The more I read their commentaries, the less I see of total agreement and the more I see of wondrous diversity.

On this one point, however, we can all agree: The Revelation of Jesus Christ, the very last book of God's Word to mankind, describes the final chapter in human history. It is in that book that we see Christ Jesus as the fulfillment of every promise that God has ever made.

In Revelation, the apostle John has recorded God's message, which is the greatest deposit of hope in the Bible. In the 404 verses of its twenty-two chapters we find:

Hope for the end of days.

Strength for when we are weak with fear.

Joy when surrounded by dread.

Purpose in the midst of an aimless culture.

Peace when storms of anxiety roll across our horizons.

Through this book, *Living Hope for the End of Days*, we have fifty-two weeks to learn how to live in hope, strength, joy, purpose, and peace! As you read through this entire book, you will discover the precious topics contained in Revelation, each of them rich in hope. And, as you read every word of God's final book of the Bible, you will reap a harvest of promised blessings!

John Barnett
Tulsa, Oklahoma
October 2006

Week 1—Worship the Christ of Revelation

(Revelation 1:1)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you continually worship Christ anew and afresh through His wonderful names in Revelation!



SUNDAY: Worship the Ever-Present Christ!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John (Revelation 1:1).

In the latter part of the first century, in the azure green of the Aegean Sea off the coast of Turkey was a barren island, a Roman penal colony, a rock quarry that cut stones for imperial temples and buildings. A boat carrying John, the last apostle, made its way to that colony island. John, as the final living member of Christ's inner circle, was considered to be the last of the empire's greatest enemies.

When John reached that prison island, he was perhaps eighty years old. Wizenened and stooping, gray and halting, and scarred by the fight, he was still forced to work in the rock quarries. Every day, while he worked in those quarries, he had plenty of opportunities to meditate on what Jesus had done while he walked with Him, and in his own sixty years of ministry.

As storms blew in over the Aegean Sea, I am confident that he found great peace remembering Jesus' power to still howling winds as He did when the disciples were in the boat on the stormy Sea of Galilee. Jesus spoke authoritatively to the wind and waves, and both immediately became calm, as did His disciples. Whenever John saw withered vegetation on Patmos, he thought about the time Jesus caused the fig tree to wither. When he saw prisoners die, John meditated on Jesus' power to touch dead bodies and bring them back to life. He recalled personally seeing the widow at Nain sobbing as her son's coffin was being taken out to the burial place. But then Jesus walked out and intercepted the crowd; and when He touched the coffin, the boy sat up. John was also there when

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. So on and on, the Holy Spirit prompted precious memories of the One who loved him so!

No matter where John was, he was near his beloved and ever-present Lord Jesus Christ. When he “looked full in His wonderful face, the things of earth grew strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”¹ And John’s heart, overwhelmed with joy, worshiped!

You and I have the same opportunity to worship the ever-present Christ, but we get to see more of Him than John saw. Having written just one of the four Gospels, John did not personally witness what Matthew, Mark, and Luke reported. But we have *all the Gospels* through which to see Christ, so we have an abundance of precious moments of Christ’s power to meditate upon. This same ever-present Christ is with us at home, at school, at work, at play, or wherever we may be! What a thought! I wonder: *Do you purposefully look for evidence of Christ’s presence throughout your day and talk about it over dinner?* I hope so!

Like a landmark, Jesus will never be out of sight for us. Consider this illustration: When I was a child, I went on camping expeditions that my father used to lead. We fished and canoed on those great Canadian lakes. We camped in a wilderness area; there were no homes along the lakeshore, no boathouses, no towers, or other man-made landmarks to help us find our way. So we picked out a particular landmark to sight, such as a rock outcropping or a fallen tree along the shore. Then we always stayed in sight of it so that we could find our way back to camp. Like a physical landmark that helps us keep our bearings, Jesus is always in sight.

The next time you feel alone, abandoned, desolate, or useless, remember that just as Jesus was never out of sight for John, He will never be out of sight for you—ever!

Now please join with me in spirit as you read the following prayer for the week ahead. May its words, as well as the others throughout *Living Hope*, sink deep within your heart and soul so that our spirits blend together as one voice before the throne of God.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, we thank You that we can very appropriately end our journey through the Word with this wonderful unveiling of Jesus in Revelation, which is a priceless gift. We can think of no higher honor, no greater privilege, and no more solemn responsibility than to come before Your presence. We come humbly, asking You to clothe us with humility. We come reverently, asking You to cleanse and purge us from any of the leaven of sin that always seeks to attach itself to us. We come rejoicing, for the blood of Jesus Christ, unmerited by us, is Your favor upon us. We thank You for His cleansing. We come worshipfully, asking that You would accept the upraised hearts that we offer to You today. We come overflowing with joy, for we know that we are redeemed, and we are persuaded that You, our Redeemer, can keep us unto that day when we sit at Your table in heaven. We pray that every part of our study of this precious book of Revelation will have Your favor upon it. Meet with us in a very special, transforming, and glorifying way in our lives, that we will know that surely we have been with Jesus, in whose name we ask all this. Amen.*

MONDAY: Behold Your God!

“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:28, emphasis added).

William Temple (1881–1944), the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942 to 1944, defined worship as follows: “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”²

If there is no worship, there is no change in the life. Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. How? **Quickening** of our conscience by His holiness—being renewed through the life and power of our endless lives in Christ; **nourishment** of mind by His truth; **purification** of imagination by His beauty; **openness** of our hearts by His love; **submission** of our wills to His purpose. All of this gathered together in adoration is the greatest of all expressions of which we are capable.

One clear way God invites our worship is by revealing Himself through His divine names. Since Revelation is a revelation of Jesus and His person, its twenty-two chapters are a gold mine as the Lord unveils His deity through more than sixty-seven names and titles. The greatest insight into adoring the Lord comes by way of His names and titles in His Word. They are real treasures to find!

Chapter 1: He is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, ruler over the kings of the earth, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Almighty, the First and the Last, the Son of Man, the living One!

Chapter 2: He is the administrator of the church who has the sharp two-edged sword, eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like fine brass!

Chapter 3: He is the One who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, who is holy and true, who has the key of David, who is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God!

Chapter 4: He is the One who sits on the throne in heaven!

Chapter 5: He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and the Lamb who was slain—who lives forever and ever!

Chapter 6: He is the wrathful Lamb!

Chapter 7: He is the redeeming Lamb and the providing Lamb!

Chapter 8: He is the patient collector of our prayers!

Chapter 9: He holds back the monsters from the abyss!

Chapter 10: He is the Creator of heaven and earth and sea!

Chapter 11: He is Christ, the Lord God Almighty!

Chapter 12: He is the Christ, the Lamb, Jesus!

Chapter 13: He is the Lamb, whose is the Book of Life!

Chapter 14: He is the Lamb on Mount Zion, Jesus, the Lord, the Son of Man!

Chapter 15: He is again the Lamb, the Lord God Almighty, the King of saints, the Lord!

Chapter 16: He is the One who was and is and is to be, the Lord God Almighty!

Chapter 17: He is Jesus, the Lamb—Lord of lords and King of kings!

Chapter 18: He is the Lord God!

Chapter 19: He is the Lord our God, the Lord God, the Lamb, Jesus, the Faithful and True, the Word of God, Almighty God, King of kings and Lord of lords!

Chapter 20: He is Jesus, the Christ!

Chapter 21: He is the Alpha and Omega, the Lamb, the Lord God Almighty!

Chapter 22: He is the Lamb, the Lord God, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, Jesus, the Root and Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star, the Lord Jesus—*our* Lord Jesus!

Worship Christ in His majesty—worship Him in all His glorious names! Nothing can possibly come into your life that the all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present Christ didn't know about long before it happened. As Creator, He made you as you are; he picked your family, limitations and all. The Lamb has paid the price for sin. And the Lamb is the only One who has the reservation book, the Book of Life, which is the key to enter into the paradise He has prepared for His bride. Have you made your reservation? Is your name written there? Are you in touch with Him to prepare for what is ahead?

Are you worshipping the manufacturer and owner of your life in grateful awe that He knows and cares for you?

TUESDAY: The Bible—God's Worship Guide

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16 NASB, emphasis added).

Could I challenge you? For a wonderful worship experience in Revelation, search for all the names and titles of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Over the next few weeks, begin your search by looking, chapter by chapter, for the names and titles of Christ in Revelation. Use markers, colored pencils, or pens to mark each one in a special way that will help you remember where you found them. As you mark each one, ask yourself the “So what ...?” question: *So what does Jesus as the _____ (fill in a name or title) mean in my life for today?*

Learn to practice noticing God’s presence during each day. Worship ought to become a daily habit: *Pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Punctuate every moment with inward whisperings of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving: *Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice* (Psalm 55:17).

To heighten your preparation for public worship, be sure to have personal times of inner worship, confession, Bible study, and attentiveness to Christ, your present teacher: *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it ... that you may ... do ... all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and ... have good success* (Joshua 1:8).

Learn to worship God in many different settings of worship. Worship God when you are alone. Have home groups not only for Bible study but also for the very experience of worship itself. Gather in little groups of two and three to learn to offer up a sacrifice of praise. Many blessings can occur in smaller gatherings that, just by sheer size, cannot happen in the larger experience. These little experiences of worship will empower and impact your larger Sunday gatherings as well.

Determine to prepare for the gathering of the church for worship. On Saturday night, prepare by having an inward examination and confession prior to going to bed early. On Sunday morning, before the actual worship service, go over the hymns and Scripture passages that will be used that day. Then pray that God will fill the sanctuary with His presence.

You can have one of the most vital ministries at your church by arriving ten to fifteen minutes early and sitting, with your Bible open, in the worship center. Pray that the Holy Spirit will empower those who will minister during the service: the instrumentalists, the orchestra, the choir, the soloists, the worship leaders, and the one who ministers the Word. Let go of all inner distractions so that you can really participate in the worship service.

If you do these things faithfully, you will be well on the way to growing in your ability to worship!

WEDNESDAY: Cultivate a Life of Worship

*Having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and **departed to a solitary place**; and there He prayed* (Mark 1:35, emphasis added).

Listen to what one man who spent years meditating on worship has written: “Worship is something we do. Studying the theology of worship and debating the forms of worship are

all good, but by themselves they are inadequate. In the final analysis we learn to worship by worshiping.”³

Willingly offer yourself to the Lord as an instrument for worship. As an individual, learn to let go of your agenda, your concerns, your being blessed, and your hearing of the Word of God. The language of the gathered fellowship is not “I,” but “we.” So surrender to the ways of God; submit to others in the Christian fellowship; desire that God’s life will rise up in the group, not just within you as an individual. Seek to become of one mind, of one accord. Cultivate a life of complete spiritual dependency. Dependency means that you will be completely dependent upon God for anything significant to happen. The work is God’s and not yours. A simple way to start this is to pray before doing anything; invite the Lord’s presence, blessing, and guidance. Then give Him all the credit for anything good that happens.

Guard yourself from exposure to harmful influences that will kill worship. Cultivating worship also involves dealing with all the weeds that grow and choke the growth of your crop, as well as the pests that try to steal the harvest. For example, some of us are in the high-risk category for skin cancer. So what should we do? We should stay away from exposure to those deadly UV rays. Since all of us are prone to soul cancer that eats away at our worship, we should avoid having a lot of exposure to TV rays because they distract, deaden, and deflate the welling up of our souls in worship to God! If you cannot fast from TV, newspapers, and magazines for even a week, then you are a very *weak* Christian, and at risk spiritually.

Part of learning to cultivate worship is learning how to drown out distractions through prayers of gratefulness to God. For example, when I am preaching, I love to have babies and little children in the congregation. Rather than feeling that distractions somehow deter us from worshiping God, we should learn to simply receive whatever happens in a gathered worship experience. This applies to whatever happens at home, or other places of private worship, as God tests our spirit. Grumbling and complaining cannot be successfully partnered with a spirit of adoration and worship!

THURSDAY: The Fruits of Worship

Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15, emphasis added).

Did you know that there will be many times that you will not “feel” like worshiping? Perhaps you have had so many disappointing experiences in the past that you think it is hardly worth it because there is such a low sense of the power of God. Even so, you still need to offer the sacrifice of worship to God.

The sacrifice of worship is offered to God Himself. It is vital that you join other saints to amplify your worship. When we are gathered for genuine worship, we are like a heap of burning coals encouraging one another to warmth of love and devotion. One log by itself cannot burn for very long, but when many logs are put together, even if they are poor logs, they can make quite a fire. Remember the counsel of Proverbs 27:17 that *iron sharpens iron*. Even rather dull lives can help each other if they are willing to try.

Go to church—even if you do not feel like it.
Go to church—even if worship has been discouraging and dry before.
Go to church—praying.
Go to church—expecting.
Go to church—looking for God to do a new and living work among you as His family.

The sacrifice of worship deepens repentance. Resentments cannot be held with the same tenacity when we enter His gracious light. As Jesus says, if we have broken fellowship with another person, we need to leave our gift at the altar and go set the matter straight. God is very explicit about this: *“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ... be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”* (Matthew 5:23–24). In worship, an increased power steals its way into the heart sanctuary and an increased compassion grows in the soul.

The sacrifice of worship bears the fruit of obedience. Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change: ... *Rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh* (Philippians 3:3).

The sacrifice of worship widens our ministry. Holy Spirit-prompted ministry saves worship from becoming an escape from the pressing needs of the real people around us. Worship enables us to hear the call to service clearly so that we respond like Isaiah. When Isaiah had the vision of our majestic, holy, and righteous God sitting on His throne, full of all His glory, he was instantly brought to his knees with a sense of his total unworthiness (see Isaiah 6:1–8). He was humbled; there was no more room for pride. His worship of the Most High God produced repentance, obedience, and finally, ministry, as he cried out, “Here I am, Lord! Send me!” Though still very conscious of his sin, he had been prepared to serve anywhere, anytime, anyhow, or anyway God directed because he was completely submitted to God’s will.

How would you evaluate your worship? Are you sensing that God is preparing you to serve anywhere, anytime, anyhow, or anyway as He directs? Are you willing to submit to that will?

FRIDAY: Worship—Then Serve Christ

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matthew 4:10, emphasis added).

Worship is the most vital and life-changing topic of the whole Bible. When Jesus was alone in the wilderness (except for the devil’s presence), He stated His extremely important mandate for serving Him. In Matthew 4:10, Jesus gave this order: ... *“Away with you, Satan!”* (10a). Then He quoted a verse from His memory arsenal of the Word of God: “... *‘You shall **worship** the LORD your God, and Him only you shall **serve**’*” (Matthew 4:10b, emphasis added).

Did you fully grasp what is supposed to come *before* service? *Worship!* This is God's order. All service for Him is to flow out of worship. No worship—no service. As a child, if I did not wash my hands, I did not get to eat. But when I got a little older, my credo became this: “No Bible, no breakfast; no Bible, no bed.” The Lord's rule is this: “No worship, no service.”

Does ministry ever get dull, tedious, and wearying? If so, that is a warning sign that the oil of worship is running low. Worship must always come before service. When the worship wanes, service becomes a drag because the Holy Spirit does not energize it.

We start worshiping God at the moment of our salvation *for we are the true circumcision ...* (Philippians 3:3 NASB). In this verse, the apostle Paul is talking about the Judaizers who were not followers of Christ. He described them in Philippians 3:2: *Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!* These are the people who believed in an external form of salvation, or “salvation by surgery.” They believed that if you are circumcised, you are going to heaven. This is the same as believing that if you are baptized or join the church or “walk an aisle” that you will go to heaven.

Baptism, joining a church, or “walking an aisle” are all external things. But God is after an internal heart belief. Therefore, He says that the only people who will go to heaven are those ... *who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh* (Philippians 3:2–3 NASB).

Do not count on what *you* have done, but on what *Christ* has accomplished. If you are born again, you are one who has been transformed from the inside out. God transforms us to be genuine worshipers when we are saved. We can then worship in the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, because of no longer having confidence in our own flesh.

Do you see why worship must come before service? Much service can be done in the power of the flesh, but only the Holy Spirit energizes true worship. Worshiping God is the most marvelous, encouraging, strengthening, and uplifting thing we can do!

SATURDAY: Worship Christ through Your Service

*For we are the circumcision, who **worship God** in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh ...* (Philippians 3:3, emphasis added).

Even our very acts of ministry should be acts of worship that reveal His “worthship,” or just how much Christ is worth to us! Motivation is everything; only what is done out of adoration for Christ and love for others will last. We can have such a ministry, serving Jesus in any place, at any time, in any way, and anyhow we are—no matter what is going on in our lives. That is a wonderful way to live!

We can serve Christ in any place. John was isolated on Patmos, far from his home in Galilee, far from the church, far from anyone but God. And yet where was he when Jesus Christ came to reveal Himself to him? Revelation 1:10a says, *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day* He was serving God right where he was.

Even though his captors tried to restrict John from witnessing, doing church work, and preaching, he grabbed every opportunity to talk about the Word and all that Christ had done. If we are God's servants we will likewise be talking about the Word, and telling others what Christ is doing in our lives.

We can serve Christ at any time. John was at least eighty years old and near death. He had not seen Jesus for sixty years. Everything had been taken away from him—his scrolls, books, church, freedom, and health—for he had to sleep in a cave. John, however, did not let that defeat him; he still served Christ to the best of his ability.

There are no limits to what God can do through us, no matter what age we happen to be. Even a young child can serve Christ. For example, as a young boy, David served the Lord and meditated on Him. The seeds of all the great psalms were planted back in his boyhood days when he was still a shepherd. God says that we can serve Him at any age in life. That is a comforting thought! There is no mandatory retirement from serving the Lord.

We can serve Christ in any way. We can still serve God regardless of where we are, what is taken away from us, or how hard the times might be. John chose to serve the Lord any way he could, and what he loved to do most was worship Christ.

We can serve Christ no matter how we are. We can serve Christ in any condition in which we find ourselves, even when we are suffering. John was suffering loneliness, pain, discouragement, deprivation, and abuse. Most of all, on this pagan island with the soldiers who worshiped false gods, John was suffering spiritual oppression. Because John was in the forefront in fighting the kingdom of darkness, Satan especially attacked him.

Make a choice to live in hope. You can decide today to emulate John's attitude by asking God to give you this spirit:

"It does not matter where I am: I am going to serve Christ in any place. It does not matter how old I am: I am going to serve Christ at any time of life, even at the very end. It does not matter what my circumstances are: I am going to serve Christ in any way I can, no matter what they take out of my life. It does not matter how I am, even if I am suffering: I am going to serve Christ anyhow. This is my way to worship the glorious ever-present Christ—to show Him just how much He's worth to me!"

If your heart's desire is to serve the Lord in this manner, I encourage you to bow your head and humbly ask Him to use you anywhere you go, and at any time He wants to—and He will. Like Isaiah, tell Him: "Here I am, Lord! Send me!" Then make the words of this beautiful old song become a deep prayer of your heart:

Fill Thou My Life, O Lord My God

*Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.*

*Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor for the praising heart—
I ask Thee for a life made up
Of praise in every part:*

*Praise in the common things in life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.*

*Fill every part of me with praise:
Let all my being speak of Thee
And of Thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be, and weak.*

*So shalt Thou, Lord, from even me
Receive the glory due;
And so shall I begin on earth
The song forever new.*

*So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free;
But all my life, In every step,
Be fellowship with Thee.*

—**Horatius Bonar, 1800–1889**

Week 2—Knowing Christ's Presence Today

(Revelation 1:2)

As the end of days approaches, you can find genuine and lasting hope by knowing Christ's presence!



SUNDAY: Know That Christ Is Alive

[John] *bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to all things **that he saw*** (Revelation 1:2, emphasis added).

John saw Jesus on Patmos—alive and powerful. The book of Revelation introduces us to the risen Christ of the Gospels and shows Him as the real Christ. When Jesus stepped from the tomb on Resurrection morning, God unleashed the greatest power of all. And that is what Jesus Christ is like TODAY!

Often we fail to understand the magnitude of what really happened that morning. After His Resurrection, something had wondrously changed: Jesus *no longer limited Himself to one location*. From the manger to the cross, He had been limited for thirty-three years to being *in only one place at a time*. Jesus had humbled Himself, emptied Himself, and limited Himself to being localized. But now He was accessible anywhere, anytime, and to anyone! His power was then available everywhere, and all the time! That is absolutely amazing!

Even in His condition of being localized, Jesus accomplished more than any human ever has or will. He grew up perfectly, mastered God's Word perfectly, and related to His family, friends, and neighbors perfectly for thirty years.

At the dawn of Jesus' public ministry, He perfectly obeyed God at His baptism; He perfectly defeated Satan's advances in the wilderness; and He perfectly began to serve God's will as He set out as an itinerant preacher.

For three and one-half years Jesus awesomely served in the power of God. Wherever He went, Christ's very presence made sure that death fled, disease faded, and despair melted. Broken bodies

that came in contact with Jesus were mended; ruined lives were repaired; sightless eyes were restored; deaf ears were filled with sound; missing fingers were returned; and hungering lives were satisfied. And Jesus did all that while being *in one place at a time*.

Christ is alive! After the Resurrection, because Jesus was no longer trapped by time and space, He seemed to be everywhere at once. For the next forty days, the New Testament records Jesus crisscrossing the tiny land of Israel from north to south.

We find Him on mountaintops, back roads, inside locked rooms, on the shore, and everywhere else that He was looked for or needed. He met with the grieving women at the tomb, comforted the sorrowing Mary, calmed the frightened disciples (inside the locked room without opening the door), showed up at dawn on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, confronted and restored a soaking-wet Peter, assured a doubtful, trembling Thomas, and visited with every one of the five hundred others who had believed on Him.

Jesus accomplished all that in an occupied country crawling with spies, soldiers, and religious leaders filled with hatred. And for forty days after the empty tomb, He was never seen, even once, by any unloving eyes; He was never touched, even once, by unloving hands. Christ's presence was unstoppably available—everywhere. And He's the same today!

For the previous three and one-half years, Jesus' followers could have any need met—if *they could find Him*. But now, because of the cross and empty tomb, He is available anywhere, anytime, and to anyone. Therefore, any sin can be forgiven; any doubt can be overcome; any sadness can be comforted; any disappointment can be stopped; any fearfulness can be arrested; any loneliness can be ended; and any defilement can be cleansed.

Today, know that Christ is alive! So think about Christ being constantly available within you to help your fears, doubts, pains, and temptations. He is only a prayer away—so call upon Him!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, I pray that "Christ being constantly available within" will become more than just simple words to us. Today, as we contemplate Resurrection morning—the greatest event of all time—may we know that the One who left the tomb that day is present with us even now. For You are everywhere, all the time, for anyone who wants to know You. For those who do not yet know You personally, we pray that they would cry out to You from their heart of hearts and say, "Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" May they come to know true faith in You, Lord Jesus. We thank You for all that You do because You are no longer limited to being in one place at one time, but are with us everywhere! In the name of Jesus we thank You. Amen.*

MONDAY: Know What Christ Did

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3, emphasis added).

The greatest power unleashed in Jesus is that He is now available anywhere, anytime, and to anyone. In fact, look at all the chapters in the gospel by John where Jesus was meeting people right where they were—just as He does today:

- Watching Nathaniel sit and think under a tree, Jesus answered his questions (1:46–49). The Lesson: **You can bring your questions to Jesus.**
- Attending a wedding, Jesus rescued the servants when the wine ran out (2:9). The Lesson: **You can bring your emergencies to Jesus.**
- Waiting up, Jesus explained salvation to Nicodemus when he slipped to Christ's side in the dark (3:2). The Lesson: **You can bring your struggles to Jesus.**
- Sitting on the well, Jesus revealed His true identity to a seeking woman overflowing with sins (4:18–19). The Lesson: **You can bring your sins to Jesus.**
- Approaching the paralytic lying on the ground, Jesus healed him when he was hopeless and helpless (5:6). The Lesson: **You can bring your limitations to Jesus.**
- Coming across the waves to a storm-tossed boat, Jesus quieted the fearful disciples (6:17–19). The Lesson: **You can bring your fears to Jesus.**
- Crying out for anyone who thirsts to come to Him, Jesus promised to give “rivers of living water” (7:37–38). The Lesson: **You can bring your longings to Jesus.**
- Looking into the heart of the adulterous woman who stood stained by her sins, Jesus showed her mercy and forgiveness (8:3–11). The Lesson: **You can bring your deepest stains to Jesus.**
- Finding the blind man in his darkness, Jesus opened his eyes (9:6–7). The Lesson: **You can bring your confusing times to Jesus.**
- Opening the door to a safe and secure home for lost sheep, Jesus offered safe pasture (10:9). The Lesson: **You can bring your longing for security to Jesus.**
- Defeating death and its hopelessness at the grave of Lazarus, Jesus offered new life (11:25–27). The Lesson: **You can bring your fears about death to Jesus.**
- Accepting the worship of Mary who loved Him so, Jesus received it as a sweet fragrance (12:3–8). The Lesson: **You can bring your love to Jesus.**

- Confronting His disciples with their dirty feet and hearts filled with pride, Jesus washed away their sin (13:5–15). The Lesson: **You can bring your besetting sins to Jesus.**
- Assuring His disciples when they had troubled hearts, Jesus promised that they had a future mansion with Him in heaven (14:1–6). The Lesson: **You can bring your future to Jesus.**
- Coming close to prune away unprofitable parts when lives were fruitless, Jesus caused that pruning to bear fruit (15:2). The Lesson: **You can bring all of your life to Jesus.**
- Promising to convict when hearts were sinful, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to keep His children on track spiritually (16:7–9). The Lesson: **You can bring your secrets to Jesus.**
- Praying for sanctification by the truth of His Word, Jesus promised to open His children's understanding of the Scriptures (17:17). The Lesson: **You can bring your Bible-study times to Jesus.**
- Watching over His disciples in their darkest hour, Jesus looked out for them in spite of their weakness in the garden (18:8). The Lesson: **You can bring your times of weakness to Jesus.**
- Caring for His mother even as He died, Jesus set an example of the importance of family (19:25–27). The Lesson: **You can bring your family to Jesus.**
- Finding Thomas in his doubt and bringing him to faith, Jesus lovingly reassured him (20:25–29). The Lesson: **You can bring your doubts to Jesus.**
- Standing on the shore when Peter needed restoration, Jesus lovingly inspired Peter to greater service for Christ (21:15–18). The Lesson: **You can bring your failures to Jesus.**

I encourage you to go back through the above list and pause on the bold action statement at the end of each point. Think about what Christ wants to do in your life personally. It can help cement these truths in your mind if you say each of them out loud: “I can bring my questions to Jesus; I can bring my emergencies to Jesus; I can bring my struggles to Jesus”; and so forth. Do you see the power of personalizing Christ's presence in your life today? Believe that He is just as near to *you*, and ask for His help!

TUESDAY: Know That You Believe Christ

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28, emphasis added).

Thomas was not present on the first occasion when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His Resurrection. The others told him about it afterward, but he replied, *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it"* (John 20:25 NIV).

Thomas is our pattern; he reflects a part of us because we also struggle and doubt. Yet Christ understands and will meet us at that point of struggle—as He did for Thomas by appearing again a week later when he was present. Although Jesus offered to fulfill the conditions of Thomas' test, the mere sight of Him was enough; he fell at Christ's feet and worshiped.

Is that sight not clear enough for you also? Are Jesus' wounded hands not evidence enough for you of His love? God the Father says that His action in Christ is perfectly clear, *so much so* that there is no excuse for failure to believe it. In fact, He says that the way of salvation in Christ *... has been made known ...* (Romans 3:21 NIV). The way of salvation has been made as clear as a pristine mountain stream.

"Today the hand of a gracious God holds out the way of salvation to you. He asks you to look closely at His hand, for it is a wounded hand, one bearing the print of the nail received by Jesus when He died for your salvation. By faith you may put out your hand and touch that wound, which is irrefutable evidence of God's great love for you.

The One extending that hand died for you. Allow Him to enclose your hand, to enclose you, and to bring you into that great company of those who possess eternal life and who shall never perish."¹

Bring your lack of faith and your doubts to Him. With the hand of faith, reach out and touch Him *today!* For wherever you are, Jesus is there. Just think of all Christ can do now that He is available anywhere, anytime, and to anyone!

WEDNESDAY: Know That Christ Defeated Death

... Through death He ... destroy[ed] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release[d] those who through fear of death were ... subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14–15, emphasis added).

Over fifty-five million humans will enter eternity this year. Some will perish through starvation or murder; others through disease and accident. Some will die painlessly while others will die painfully, but *all of them* will die. Is that a result of a catastrophic tragedy? No, it is simply daily life and death on planet Earth. Death itself is not the ultimate tragedy; the ultimate tragedy

is being *unprepared* for death. The solution God offers for sin is the gift of His Son, whose death on the cross paid the penalty for man's sin and rebellion. *God went the limit.*

All humans are helpless: rich or poor, armed or unarmed, weak or powerful, known or faceless. To rescue us from our hopeless sinful state, God has communicated with us, and has taken on humanity by becoming the man, Jesus Christ. His life is recorded in the Bible. Jesus has revealed to us, in a life identifiably human and unmistakably divine, that the true nature of God is love. This is how the Bible states it: *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son [Jesus Christ], that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16 NIV).

Simple faith in Christ gets us registered in heaven (1 Peter 1:4; see also Hebrews 12:23). Christ gives us a special, private PIN number, which is a secret name that only He knows (Revelation 2:17). We are His. We have access to Him through faith, and that is the greatest treasure on earth.

Now comes your part: Are you willing to admit that God is right when He says you have rebelled? Do you recognize your need of a personal relationship with God? Because Jesus took the penalty for your sins, accept the Bible's invitation: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ..."* [for] *if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ... For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved"* (Acts 16:31a; Romans 10:9, 13).

If these verses have spoken to your heart, simply tell God that you want to change the direction of your sinful life by receiving Jesus!

THURSDAY: Know That Christ Knows You

*"My sheep hear My voice, and I know **them**, and they follow Me"* (John 10:27, emphasis added).

There is an unforgettable illustration in the funeral ceremony of Empress Zita, the last Hapsburg Empress:

Thousands fell in line behind the coffin drawn by six black horses. The procession came to a stop at the Capuchin Church in Vienna, and there, a long-observed tradition was enacted. As a member of the funeral party knocked on the closed door of the church, a voice from within asked, "Who goes there?"

The titles were read aloud: "Queen of Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia. Queen of Jerusalem, Grand Duchess of Tuscany and Krakow." "I do not know her," came the response from within the church.

A second knock, and the question of "Who goes there?" brought forth the response, "Zita, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary." Again the reply, "I do not know her."

When the inevitable question was put the third time, the answer was simply, "Zita, a poor sinner." "Come in," came the welcoming voice, as the doors were slowly opened.²

Salvation is the greatest work of God in the universe. The convict who found Christ as he studied a Moody correspondence course would certainly agree with that statement. In answer to one of the questions, which gave him an opportunity to express where he stood in relation to his newfound faith, he wrote down: "I am a new man in an old body." It was a most perceptive remark, for that is exactly what salvation is.

Being "a new man in an old body" will go even further than that saved prisoner realized. One day he will be "a new man in a new body." Listen to this seven-step summary of what happens to all who come by faith to God through Christ: (Emphasis added in the verses below.)

1. **Regeneration—when God changes my heart:** *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; ... and cause you to walk in My statutes ..."* (Ezekiel 36:26–27).
2. **Conversion—when God changes my life:** *"... Unless you are converted ..., you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:3).
3. **Repentance—when God changes my mind:** *"Bear fruits worthy of repentance"* (Matthew 3:8).
4. **Adoption—when God changes my family:** ... *You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ...* (Romans 8:15–17).
5. **Sanctification—when God changes my behavior:** *For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. ... "I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them"* (Hebrews 10:14, 16).
6. **Justification—when God changes my state:** *Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1).
7. **Glorification—when God changes my place:** *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me ... that they may behold My glory which You have given Me ..."* (John 17:24).³

Are you a recipient of God's greatest work in the universe? When you know God, and salvation's fruit unfolds in your soul, He does a mighty work that I like to call "The Signature of God." Has "The Signature of God" been written across your life? If not, I urge you to make a conscious choice today to live in such hope!

FRIDAY: Know That You Know Christ

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves ... that Jesus Christ is in you ... (2 Corinthians 13:5, emphasis added).

Perhaps your name will be called today, and your life will end here on earth. Are you ready? Do you want to *make sure* you are going to heaven? Be sure you know that your sins are gone. Be sure you know that God has justified you. What does it mean to be “justified”? In popular everyday language *justified* can be paraphrased “just as if I’d never sinned.” Consider this illustration:

Some years ago a wealthy Englishman bought a Rolls Royce car and took it to France on his vacation. It broke down. At great expense the factory flew out a mechanic and not only repaired the car but entertained the customer in the best available hotel. When he arrived home he expected to receive a large bill but none came. Eventually he wrote, asking for his account to be rendered.

He received this reply: “Dear Sir, We have no record of anything ever having gone wrong with your car.”⁴

That is exactly what it means to be justified. It means that God has no record of anything ever having gone wrong in your life. Knowing Christ means knowing that your sins are gone forever. Hallelujah!

The Sinner’s Prayer: The following prayer expresses the desire to transfer trust to Christ alone for eternal salvation. If its words speak of your own heart’s desire, praying them can be the link that will connect you to God.

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and there is nothing that I can do to save myself. I confess my complete helplessness to forgive my own sin or to work my way to heaven. At this moment I trust Christ alone as the One who bore my sin when He died on the cross. I believe that He did all that will ever be necessary for me to stand in your holy presence. I thank you that Christ was raised from the dead as a guarantee of my own resurrection. As best as I can, I now transfer my trust to Him. I am grateful that He has promised to receive me despite my many sins and failures. Father, I take you at your word. I thank you that I can face death now that you are my Savior. Thank you for the assurance that you will walk with me through the deep valley. Thank you for hearing this prayer. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.⁵

If you prayed in faith, God will receive you. He will take your sins and put them away—never to remember them against you forever! Oh, how wonderfully complete is the deliverance our God has provided for sinful man!

SATURDAY: Exposed to Christ

... *When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, [who] were uneducated and untrained men, ... **they realized that they had been with Jesus*** (Acts 4:13, emphasis added).

The transformation Christ brought about in the apostle John is remarkable. He manifested symptoms of intimate, personal exposure to Jesus, such as the following traits, which reflect the character of Christ. Ponder whether or not these traits are also in your life:

Authenticity: John became honest, genuine, wholesome, and real. From Scripture, it is easy to see that he really loved Jesus. In John 13:25 and 21:20, we see him reclining on Christ's chest and talking with Him. John kept as close as he could to Jesus. **Are you experiencing the reality of knowing Christ with authenticity?**

Humility: John was no longer at the center of his own world; Christ was. That is the essence of humility. Thus, the apostle John became the "disciple whom Jesus loved." That precious description of John is found five times in the New Testament (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). **Are you enjoying life as God meant it to be by experiencing true Christlike humility?**

Loyalty: John always wanted to be wherever Jesus was. Nothing kept him away. It was a passion he had and kept. John was at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1); he witnessed the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37); and he was invited into the intimate moments of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). **Are you experiencing the utter completion offered through loyalty to Christ and His family?**

Responsibility: John earned Christ's trust by his obedience. If Jesus gave him a job, he did it wholeheartedly. He was disciplined to the point of being trustworthy. That is why we see the touching moment at the cross when Christ entrusted his mother, Mary, to John's care (John 19:26–27). **Are you experiencing the joy of living up to your God-given responsibility in this life?**

Tenacity: John was willing to endure to the end. Nothing could deflect him; he clung tenaciously to Christ. In John 21:20–23, Jesus told him that he would have to wait "until I come." And wait John did. Revelation is the record of Christ's coming to him, just as He promised. **Are you tenaciously clinging to Christ?**

Make a choice to live in hope. You have a choice to live in despair or hope, so I pray that you will make the choice to live in hope! Get exposed to Christ today. Then live with the "symptoms of exposure to Him" flowing from your life. Read Revelation 1; look at who Jesus really is!

See what John saw. Like John, invite Jesus to be near you. Then, for His glory, He will make you authentic, humble, loyal, responsible, and tenacious!

As we close this week's devotionals, I encourage you to sing this song to the Lord, asking Him to make His presence sweetly known to you this very moment!

Hiding in Thee

*O safe to the Rock that is higher than I
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly;
So sinful, so weary—Thine would I be:
Thou blest "Rock of Ages," I'm hiding in Thee.*

*In the calm of the noontide, in sorrow's lone hour,
In times when temptation casts o'er me its power,
In the tempests of life, on its wide, heaving sea,
Thou blest "Rock of Ages," I'm hiding in Thee.*

*How often in conflict, when pressed by the foe,
I have fled to my Refuge and breathed out my woe;
How often when trials like sea billows roll,
Have I hidden in thee, O Thou Rock of my soul.*

Refrain:

*Hiding in Thee, Hiding in Thee,
Thou blest "Rock of Ages," I'm hiding in Thee.*

—William O. Cushing

Week 3—Signs That the End of Days Is Near

(Revelation 1:3)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you see the signs of His coming again!



SUNDAY: Prophecy by the Numbers

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; **for the time is near*** (Revelation 1:3, emphasis added).

When Jesus walked on earth, He announced to His disciples that His coming was near. In fact, the anticipation of His soon return was what motivated the early church. Now, 2,000 years later, those who love Him are still looking for the Second Coming of Christ. Is there any way we can know that His coming is actually close at hand? I believe there is.

While studying a series I was preparing (“What’s Next for Planet Earth?”), I began examining just how much God has left for us to know about events yet to come, and found J. Barton Payne’s series of numbers regarding prophecy to be quite enlightening!

The Bible has a total of 31,103 verses, 8,352 of which are prophetic; they speak of events yet to come. All biblical predictions about the future can be grouped into 737 different predictions. Of the 8,352 verses, 6,312 (or 522 different predictions) have already happened *exactly as* God’s Word said they would. About 2,040 verses, with 215 specific predictions from God about the end of the world, are in process of being fulfilled.¹

These prophecies can be further divided into **eighteen** chronological categories (by the timing of the events). There are only **five** categories of the eighteen left to be fulfilled. Here are the categories: church prophecies, Second Coming prophecies, Millennial prophecies, Final Judgment prophecies, and New Jerusalem prophecies. Each of the prophetic signs that Christ and His apostles gave is very

specific. Jesus has explained that as we get closer to the Second Coming, we will witness these events, which will begin at the same time, run concurrently, and crescendo like the pains of a woman giving birth.

The list of the biblical signs of Christ's return will not be full blown until the actual Tribulation, after the Rapture has occurred. Each of these signs, Jesus said, is a trend. These trends are speeding up in our generation; the last seconds of the countdown clock of Christ's return are clicking away. The prophetic picture Christ painted grows clearer daily as signs captured by the apostles and prophets between 2,000 and 3,500 years ago are now happening in our lifetime.

In all history—*only* our generation has seen *every one of these events* starting to unfold. As Jesus said in Matthew 24, when you see these things happening, know that the end of days is getting near.

If Christ were to come today, are you ready to meet Him face-to-face?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, I pray that no one would evade answering this question: What will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ? For what would it profit a man if he gained the whole world but lost his own soul? Oh Christ, You are the One who fulfills every promise that God ever made. And Lord, You are not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. For those who do not know You personally, we pray that You would stir their hearts as they think about prophecy, the imminence of Your return, and the horrors that are coming. May they repent and turn in simple faith to You, oh Christ. Thank You for laying down the "Steps to Eternity" that we will be studying this week—events which will soon take place on this planet. Help us to not be ashamed before You at Your coming. May we be able to honestly say, "Lord, we're ready! Come or call for us at any time!" In Your precious name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Signs of Christ's Return

"The sign of the Son of Man will appear ... and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30, emphasis added).

All of the yet-to-be-completed prophecies fit within specific major events. Probably the most exciting are the dozens of signs of Christ's Second Coming. Jesus described many of them in incredible detail. But here is what I want you to see: Jesus said these signs will not suddenly appear. Rather, they will become a trend that amplifies and strengthens until they become overwhelming, like a woman about to give birth.

Before I survey the major events of the yet-to-be-completed prophecies (Thursday–Saturday), I will cover ten of Christ's precise, clear, and specific predictions. You may be startled. Every one of the signs that He gave to us are present in our world today. You and I are in the first generation in history to experience these signs all at once!

Ten Signs of Christ's Return

1. **The Sign of Global Travel:** Daniel was overwhelmed when he caught a glimpse of the number of people and the speed with which they would be moving about the planet in the end days. So God told him, "... *Daniel, ... seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase*" (Daniel 12:4, emphasis added).

The Bible said that there would be many involved in travel, and today the transportation industry is one of the largest segments of the global economy. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, few individuals traveled beyond their community. Until recently, horse, foot, and boat were the only modes of transportation. Yet, in our day, millions travel "to and fro" great distances every year.

2. **The Sign of a Global Explosion of Knowledge:** God said that "*knowledge shall increase*" in the end days (Daniel 12:4). For example, we've recently seen the introduction of a new generation of computer chips. Each generation has basically doubled its processing speed and power. However, the newest chip—the "Cell"—doesn't double; everything that the computer does the "Cell" multiplies by *sixty times*!

We live in a fast-paced world where many "*run to and fro*," frantically searching for whatever seems to be missing in their lives. Yet nothing satisfies: what is "hot" today is quickly "ho hum" tomorrow! God says that in the last days men will be ... *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ... always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth* (2 Timothy 3:4, 7). Do you know some people like that? Have you loved them enough to warn them of the judgment to come and to offer the only hope that can truly satisfy?

TUESDAY: Can You See These Signs of Christ's Return?

"All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8, emphasis added).

3. **The Sign of Global Weather Gone Wild:** Jesus predicted that there would be a time when weather would be so bad that not just a few but the whole world would be troubled and fearful as many thousands are killed by the prevalent chaotic weather. Jesus foresaw "*the sea and the waves roaring*" (Luke 21:25) in the last days, like the 2004 Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, and likened these trends to birth pangs—"*the beginning of sorrows*." The Greek word *odin*, often translated as "sorrows" in Matthew 24:8, literally means "birth pangs."

Paul says that the Creation is under the curse of sin but it ... *will be delivered from the bondage of corruption ...* (Romans 8:21). While the Creation likewise awaits the coming of the liberator, Christ the Lord, the universe itself will travail in intensity and frequency as the time of its delivery draws near: *For ... the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs ...* (Romans 8:22). Of course, chaotic weather has always existed, but there are indicators that we are witnessing an unusual surge in strange and devastating weather around the globe.

4. **The Sign of Global Telecommunication and Television:** God's Word explicitly specified that the whole world would simultaneously be able to see and hear globally: *The ... nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and ... will rejoice over them, ... because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth* (Revelation 11:9–10). In the apostle John's day, news traveled at "the speed of horseback." But for the first time ever, due to the invention of television and the deployment of global satellite networks during the twentieth century, news can travel the world at the speed of light.
5. **The Sign of Global Evangelism:** Jesus has told us that before the end of days, the gospel would be preached to all nations. We can now preach the gospel of Christ's sacrifice on the cross anywhere on earth through e-mail, radio or television waves. In fact, my little Web site (www.discoverthebook.org) alone has visitors from over a hundred different nations on earth! The Christian gospel is now being "*preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come*" (Matthew 24:14). Portions of God's Word or the entire Bible have been translated into over 2,300 languages and dialects, covering more than 90 percent of the world's population.
6. **The Sign of Global Pestilences:** Despite an increase in scientific knowledge, the Bible predicted that deadly diseases would still be prevalent in the end days: "... *There will be famines, pestilences [deadly diseases], and earthquakes in various places*" (Matthew 24:7). Emerging diseases such as AIDS, Ebola virus, Hantavirus, West Nile, SARS, Avian Flu, and so forth, underscore this fact. Ironically, only a few decades ago, some scientists were forecasting that advances in medicine might soon eradicate deadly diseases.

For some dear souls, becoming more aware of the details of the coming judgments can be frightening. If you find yourself struggling with fear, be like David and cry out to God, *When my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I* (Psalm 61:2). For God promises to keep you in perfect peace if your mind is trustingly focused on Him (Isaiah 26:3)!

WEDNESDAY: Our World Is Changing Fast

*"There will be signs in the sun, ... moon, and ... stars; and ... **distress of nations, with perplexity**, the sea and the waves roaring"* (Luke 21:25, emphasis added).

7. **The Sign of Global Tracking and Positioning:** The Bible says there will be technology capable of tracking the world's population and commerce: *He causes all ... to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name* (Revelation 13:16–17).
 "As an example of sophisticated tracking that has already existed for years, being recognized has never been easier for VIP patrons of the Baja Beach Club in Barcelona, Spain. Like

a scene out of a science-fiction movie, all it takes is a syringe-injected microchip implant for the beautiful men and women of the nightclub scene to breeze past a “reader” that recognizes their identity, credit balance, and even automatically opens doors to exclusive areas of the club for them. Conrad K. Chase, director of the Club, explains, “By simply passing by our reader, the Baja Beach Club will know who you are and what your credit balance is. From the moment of their implantation they will also have free entry and access to the VIP area.”²

8. **The Sign of Weapons of Mass Destruction:** The term “weapons of mass destruction” is commonly used these days, but often without the somberness that it warrants. God has warned us that at the end of the world mankind would be capable of destroying all life: “... *There will be great tribulation, ... And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved ...*” (Matthew 24:21–22). When Jesus made this prediction, the armaments of His day were swords and spears. However, with our generation’s nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, it is not only possible to wipe out all flesh on planet Earth, but it is also plausible!
9. **The Sign of the Return of the Wandering Jews to the Promised Land:** Over twenty-six centuries ago, God promised that at the end of the world, Jews would gather together once again in Israel: “... *‘Thus says the LORD God: “Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, ... and will ... bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation ...; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again”’*” (Ezekiel 37:21–22; see also Ezekiel 38:8 and Jeremiah 31:7–10). Since 1948 the world has witnessed the call of God deep within the hearts of 5.4 million Jews who have done everything they could to emigrate to the Promised Land. More arrive each day!
10. **The Sign of Israel Building a Security Wall:** God told Ezekiel 150 years, after “Israel” had been captured, its cities destroyed, and the population exiled to Assyria by Sargon, that Israel would build walls for security—even though there had been no “Israel” for 150 years! For 2,520 years after the Assyrian conquest, there was no sovereign nation called Israel until 1948. Israel was an occupied land, captured and recaptured by various conquerors for twenty-five centuries. Listen to what Ezekiel was told to say: There would be a people gathered from across the world to Israel (38:12); they would be called Israel (38:18); they would dwell in a land where the walls have been taken down (38:11). Amazing!
 Until 2002, this has always been spoken of as an allusion to defensive preparations. However, for several years now, in an effort to slow the flow of suicide bombers, Israel has been building the most notorious wall in the world. And that wall *will* be totally completed, because Ezekiel saw it taken down when Israel accepts the European Peace Treaty through the Antichrist’s rule during the Tribulation, and thus trusts in a false peace (Daniel 9:27)!

Multitudes are already trusting in a false peace, and don’t even know it. So God warns: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death* (Proverbs 14:12). There is only ONE way to escape “the way of death,” and that is to trust in Jesus who declared, “*I am the way,*

the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). In what or whom are you placing your trust today?

THURSDAY: Steps to Eternity

... Seek those things which are above, where Christ is ... (Colossians 3:1, emphasis added).

We are now going to begin our three-day look at the clear and well-described major events that lay ahead not only for those who know Jesus but also for planet Earth. I call these the “Steps to Eternity”!

Step One: The Rapture Be ready—Christ is coming!

... The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18).

Step Two: The Judgment Seat of Christ (Bema) Be holy—Christ will test our lives!

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ... Therefore we make it our aim ... to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:1, 9–10).

Step Three: Tribulation Be thankful—Christ will keep us from the hour!

*... When the Lamb opened **one of the seals**; ... I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. When He opened **the second seal**, ... Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another When He opened **the third seal**, ... behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.” When He opened **the fourth seal**, ... I looked, and behold, a pale horse.*

*And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. When He opened **the fifth seal**, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. I looked when He opened **the sixth seal**, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black ... and the moon became like blood ... the stars of heaven fell to the earth Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings ..., the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Revelation 6:1–17, emphasis added).*

The Rapture can occur at any moment! Are you ready? Are you living a holy life in anticipation of appearing before the judgment seat of Christ? Are you thankful that God will keep you from the Great Tribulation that is coming upon planet Earth? May God enable you to live your life daily in light of these truths!

FRIDAY: Be Patient

... “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people” (Hebrews 10:30, emphasis added).

Christ’s Second Coming is a constant reminder that He is coming to right all wrongs! Therefore, we need not waste our precious time trying to accomplish what He has already promised to do. God has everything under control. Allowing hurts to lead to anger and eventually fester into bitterness and a revenge-seeking spirit is a sinful and foolish pattern. For only God can completely and perfectly right all wrongs. The verses in Step Four below reveal the importance of surrendering to the Lord any desires to get even with others for hurting us.

Step Four: Christ’s Second Coming Be patient—Christ will right all wrongs!

I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like

a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; ... saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, ... captains, ... mighty men, ... horses and of those who sit on them, and ... all people, free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast, the kings ..., and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him ... and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and ... worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh (Revelation 19:11–21).

Step Five: The Millennium **Be focused—Christ will perfect the earth!**

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.** Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released ... to deceive the nations ..., Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They ... surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down ... and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire ... where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:1–10, emphasis added).*

Step Six: The Great White Throne **Be faithful—point people to Christ!**

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15).

Only our God has impeccable wisdom and perfect justice to know how and when to deal with mankind's sins against others and Himself. Our responsibility is to faithfully live a Christ-centered life that is kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving of those who have offended or hurt us—just as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us (see Ephesians 4:32). Such a consistent testimony is the best way to point others to Christ!

SATURDAY: Wise Investments with God

*“For where **your treasure** is, there **your heart** will be also” (Luke 12:34, emphasis added).*

Are you intensely asking God to do anything in particular through your life that will last forever? What do you think would most please Christ?

Step Seven: Heaven **Be investing—lay up treasures in heaven!**

Christ said, “Here is something anyone in My family can do! Here is what you can do that I will love, and I will make your investments in these areas last forever!”

- **Jesus collects all your prayers, so *pray to Him*:** *Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8).*
- **Jesus multiplies sacrificial gifts, so *give to Him*:** *Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans [a day's wage]. So He ... said to them,*

“... This poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury ...” (Mark 12:42–43).

- **Jesus counts souls you lead to Him, so win the lost to Christ:** *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? (1 Thessalonians 2:19).*
- **Jesus remembers humble service, so serve Him:** *... As He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head ... “to anoint [His] body for burial. [And] wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Mark 14:3, 8–9).*
- **Jesus loves missionaries who do outreach, so go for Him:** *“Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29).*

Make a choice to live in hope. Investing in heaven is the secret to having living hope for the end of days! Whenever you give significant, regular, sacrificial time to God, you are making a choice to live in hope. Whenever you share Christ with loved ones, friends, neighbors, and others whom God brings into your path, you are giving them an opportunity to live in hope as well. And whenever you invest financially in heaven instead of laying up treasures on earth that will soon be destroyed, you are once again sending ahead “gold, silver, and precious stones” to build upon in heaven.

Are you diligently preparing for Christ’s return—eager to lovingly welcome Jesus, with a clear conscience, as you meet Him in the air at the Rapture, or at the time He escorts you through the “valley of the shadow of death”?

I exhort you to consciously make each moment count for God and eternity! For time is the only thing you cannot recover, earn more of, get from someone else, or do over again. It is an irreversible river that is flowing by ceaselessly at sixty seconds per minute, sixty minutes per hour!

I pray that you are excited about seeing Jesus—it could be today!

Week 4—Get Ready to Meet Jesus

(Revelation 1:4)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you see Christ's soon return through signs of the end of the world like widespread tribulation, tsunamis, and global travel advances!



SUNDAY: The Greatest Tribulation

*John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and **who is to come**, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne (Revelation 1:4, emphasis added).*

This week we are examining the Revelation 1:4 promise that Jesus is the One “*who is to come*.” What will His coming be like? Every so often, we witness an event so momentous that it touches the whole planet with a glimpse of the ominous things to come when Christ returns. On December 26, 2004, the eyes of the entire world were drawn to just such an event.

That Sunday after Christmas, life ended abruptly for 150,000-plus souls as a result of the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake, which produced what is now called the Boxing Day Tsunami. So many bodies were swept out to sea in that catastrophic event that an exact number of casualties can never be verified.

It is especially notable that secular writers and news reporters used words like “apocalyptic” and “of biblical proportions” as they struggled to describe the horrific scenes of desolation and death they witnessed in Southeast Asia. Some even began to contemplate: *What if there is a catastrophe so big, so deadly, that it could wipe out life on our planet—an asteroid, a comet, or a complete climactic shift away from a life-sustaining world?* In other words, countless people, all around the globe, were anxiously thinking and talking about **the end of the world!**

As apocalyptic as the 2004 Tsunami might have seemed to some, during the seven-year period known in the Bible as the Great Tribulation there will be at least **20,000 times more deaths.**

Suffering will be so extensive, and desolation so great, that God says it will be “... *such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be*” (Matthew 24:21).

Most Bible prophecy scholars believe that the greatest number of deaths will occur in the second half of the Tribulation, which lasts forty-two months, or three and one-half years. By the end of the Tribulation, over half the population on earth will have perished. With over six billion people alive today, this means more than three billion will die!

Let’s put those astronomical figures into perspective. If an event like the 2004 Tsunami occurred daily for three and one-half years, at the rate of 150,000 deaths per day, it would still only total 189 million casualties. For half the world’s population to die by quake and tsunami in forty-two months, there would have to be one quake and tsunami each hour, sixteen hours per day, for three and one-half years. That would be more bodies to bury than we can possibly imagine!

Those figures are staggering to our human minds! That is why Jesus has said so much about the need to get ready for the end of the world. Is it possible to know **an exact date** as to when the world will end? No, for Jesus tells us, “*But of that day and hour no one knows ... but My Father only*” (Matthew 24:36). However, Jesus promised to give us signs that would indicate the end is near.

The Bible is so unique because God has already mapped out specific future events. Only the living, faithful, and true God could ever, with 100 percent accuracy, declare: “Let Me tell you the future!” God has said that is the way we can know that He is *real*. Because He *is* real, you and I can confidently make a choice to live in hope because we place our faith and trust in Christ ... *who works all things according to the counsel of His will* (see Ephesians 1:11–13).

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, we bow before You who are God because You have written the future in advance. You can be trusted because everything You’ve said has come true, as it shall into the future. You offer us Your peace like a river. Lord, I pray for those without such peace, perhaps because they’ve never met You, or they’ve gotten out of the river and are standing on the shore—separated from You because of sin and iniquity. I pray that they would flee to You, the river of mercy and peace, and be cleansed. May they let those waves of Your righteousness sweep over their lives so they can experience the newness of You, the God of new beginnings—the One who promised us an endless life of new fresh pages because the blood of Jesus Christ Your Son cleanses us from all iniquity. I pray that we would know Your peace and Your righteousness. May we take heed to watch and pray so we can get ready to stand before You. We pray this in Your precious name and for Your glory. Amen.*

MONDAY: Prophecy—Proof That God Is Real

*“Show the things that are **to come hereafter**, that we may know that you [idols] are gods; yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see it together” (Isaiah 41:23, emphasis added).*

Why do Bible-believing saints love prophecy? The precise timing and exact fulfillment of prophecy proves that God *is* the living Faithful and True God. Consider these wonderful proofs from the book of Isaiah alone: (Emphasis added in the verses below.)

- **Only God accurately knows the future.** In Isaiah 41:23 (see above) God is challenging man-made idols to perform as He has done.
- **Prophecy proves that God is real.** In the following verses, God the Father is prophetically speaking to His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah: *“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, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison I am the LORD, ... and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; **before they spring forth I tell you of them**”* (Isaiah 42:6–9, emphasis added).
- **Prophecy proves that God is reliable.** We see this in His fulfilled prophecies as well as His other mighty works: *“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none like Me, **declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done**, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure ...’”* (Isaiah 46:9–10, emphasis added).
- **Prophecy reveals the God we can trust.** Everything that our all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present God predicted for past history came to pass exactly as He said it would: *“**Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you**, lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image have commanded them’”* (Isaiah 48:5, emphasis added; see also Isaiah 48:12–13).
- **Trusting God determines our eternal destiny:** *Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer “**I am the LORD your God ... Who leads you by the way you should go**. Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. ... There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked”* (Isaiah 48:17–18, 22, emphasis added).

If you are a believer, are you letting your Redeemer lead you in the way you should go? Are you heeding His commandments? Do you have peace like a river and Christ’s abundant righteousness in your life? If you do not yet know Christ as Lord and Savior, I pray that you will make a choice to live in hope. Transfer your trust to Christ alone for your eternal salvation!

TUESDAY: Prophecy—The Key to Understanding the Future

*“... I am God, and there is none like Me, **declaring the end from the beginning, ... things that are not yet done** ...” (Isaiah 46:9–10, emphasis added).*

Almost one-third of the Bible is prophetic. Of the 8,352 verses that J. Barton Payne has identified as being prophetic, is there one that particularly explains the end of the world? Here is a real eye-opener: “... *Daniel, ... seal the book until the time of the end; **many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase***” (Daniel 12:4, emphasis added). Although “The Sign of Global Travel” and “The Sign of a Global Explosion of Knowledge” were both discussed last week, I will be expanding those points a bit further today and tomorrow.

“Many shall run to and fro”: Running “to and fro” speaks of traveling. Much of the world remained the same from Daniel’s day until our great-grandparents’ time, but the pace of change in just the last hundred years is incredible. Consider this timeline:

- **3,000 Years Ago**—David hired wooden boats, powered by wind, to help bring special wood for the temple. His son, Solomon, actually built and operated a fleet of wooden ships that sailed by wind power to carry on extensive trade with Africa, Europe, and parts of Asia. And 2,800 years ago, Jonah walked by foot to a port in Israel to purchase a ticket to sail to what is today’s Spain.
- **2,000 Years Ago**—The apostle Paul traveled around the Roman world on mapped-out highways by foot, by horse and chariot, or aboard a wooden ship moved along by wind power caught in the sails.
- **500 Years Ago**—Christopher Columbus embarked on a journey across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a sea route to China. He also probably went to the dock on foot, and boarded a wooden ship, not unlike that of David, Solomon, Jonah, and Paul’s.
- **200 Years Ago**—Benjamin Franklin walked to a dock in America to board a wooden sailing vessel for his trip to France.
- **100 Years Ago**—President Theodore Roosevelt traveled by steamship from place to place, often taking a week to get there. With the advent of steam, man was no longer tied to animal power and wind power. The steamship, locomotive, automobile, and airplane changed the entire world in just one generation!
- **Today**—Scheduled flights of airliners routinely make the trip from any of the six inhabited continents to another continent in only a few hours. No one in the history of this planet ever traveled like we can today. This is a **sign of end times**—that the end of the world is getting close!

With all the advances in travel, it does not take long to reach any place in the world. Even so, as much as one might want to flee to safety, there is nowhere on earth where a person can hide to escape God's wrath during the Tribulation: *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me* (Psalm 139:7–10).

For the Christian, that Psalm 139 passage is a comfort because God has promised to both lead and uphold us by His power!

WEDNESDAY: Knowledge Shall Increase

“... Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4, emphasis added).

Now let us look at the last half of that phrase in Daniel 12:4, which is almost an understatement when you think about life in the twenty-first century!

Today, we sit atop a database containing what is arguably the sum total of the world's accumulated knowledge every time we sit down to browse the Internet.

From wooden boats with sails to space shuttles and hypersonic orbiters; from clay tablets and a stylus to MP3's and DVD's that I can watch or create on the personal computer that can also be my phone, television, radio, stereo, workstation, word processor, electronic document file, movie studio, sound studio, telephone answering service, fax machine, copy machine and printer. And a million other things.

[Our] generation is unique in all human history. Never has humanity been forced to come to terms with so many issues simultaneously—issues for which we have no historical precedent to use as a guide. The explosive growth of knowledge has us reeling from what humanist writer Alvin Toffler terms “future shock.” It is only in this generation that last year's encyclopedia is about as useful as last month's newspaper. It has been said that the sum of human knowledge from the Flood to 1850 doubled once. It doubled again following World War II. The doubling of human knowledge increases exponentially.¹

In light of the exponential growth of knowledge since World War II especially, let me ask you this question: In comparison, how is your growth in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior? Do you see an ever-increasing difference in your understanding of God and His Word from one year to the next?

One way to evaluate your life to answer that question is to think of Scripture you've learned which has revealed a deeper understanding of God. Or perhaps you can recall a difficult circumstance you've endured, and how such suffering drew you closer to the Lord so that you are now

more able ... *to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which* [you yourself were] *comforted by God* (2 Corinthians 1:4). Praise the Lord for the spiritual growth He's granted so far, and then ask Him to strengthen weak areas so that you can better "pass on the faith" to others.

All believers are to become teachers of others, whether it is in a church setting, in the home, spreading the gospel, or exhorting a friend or neighbor in the Word. The writer of Hebrews tells us that we ... *ought to be teachers ... of full age, ... who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil* (5:12a, 14). But anyone who ... *partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe* (5:13).

If you have not yet done so, I urge you to get into the Word of God regularly so that you can gain the knowledge and wisdom that are necessary to teach others! For God says that we are to be *redeeming the time, because the days are evil* (Ephesians 5:16)!

THURSDAY: Prophecy—Sorrowful Yet Joyful

*I [John] took the little book out ... and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, **my stomach became bitter*** (Revelation 10:10, emphasis added).

When Daniel saw what it would be like in the end times, it was so overwhelming—so absolutely incomprehensible—that, like John, it made him sick. Look at what this author has to say about Daniel 10:14:

While in exile in Babylon, the prophet Daniel was given a vision of the future of Israel, up to the coming of the Messiah. Up to this point in the vision, those things that Daniel saw were relatively familiar cities, events, and people in a context that were not too far removed from his concept of reality. But then he was shown the things to come in the last days. The angel told him in Daniel 10:14, "Now I am come to make them understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days; for yet the vision is for many days."

Daniel was so staggered by what he saw it made him faint, and verse 18 records that "one like the appearance of a man" touched him, and strengthened him, so that he could go on. Daniel tried to describe those things he saw using terminology that made sense to him, but it comes to us as a series of baffling symbols, images and beasts. The things he saw terrified him. Because the visions were so completely removed from his understanding of reality, he was unable to describe them in terms that even he was able to comprehend. And so it remained, for thousands of years.

Great Bible commentators like Calvin and Luther did not even attempt to interpret the books of Daniel, or the Revelation, for that matter, saying they were allegorical or symbolic books. Matthew Henry, writing in the eighteenth century, did not fare much

better. Even commentators on these books in the early twentieth century admitted they had trouble fitting the pieces together. After all, they dealt with a restored Israel, a revived Roman empire, and a one world government. Such things were deemed to be impossible, therefore to be interpreted as allegories. The revealing angel understood what Daniel did not.²

Even with our limited but more enlightened understanding, the holocaust of the Great Tribulation to come is indeed extremely sorrowful! We therefore need to get ready to meet Jesus, and warn others to do the same. So then, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering And let us ... stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, ... but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching* (Hebrews 10:24–25, emphasis added).

FRIDAY: The Shock Wave That Rocked the World

*“... men’s hearts failing them from fear and **the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth**, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken”* (Luke 21:26, emphasis added).

On December 26, 2004, while sitting at my computer waiting for a document to print, steady news bulletins began to hit the Google News screen—

A rare earthquake has just occurred in the Indian Ocean ...
Some people may have died ...
Reports of a gigantic tsunami are coming in from all over Southeast Asia ...
The death toll is rising dramatically ...
Damage is unbelievable! Catastrophic! ...

On and on the news bulletins flashed. It quickly became evident that the greatest natural disaster of this generation had just occurred! The enormity of that event actually made our whole planet vibrate. Later, one commentator reported that the earth even wobbled on its axis and the regional map of south Asia was permanently altered. The island of Sumatra moved 100 feet. It was as if time stood still for three microseconds. The impact of the 500-mile-per-hour waves was equal to one million atom bombs.

As devastating as that earthquake was, it is as nothing compared to the power and judgment God will unleash on earth during the Great Tribulation. It is no wonder that men’s hearts will fail them from fear in anticipation of what is yet to come!

If you are a born-again Christian, you can rejoice because you no longer need to fear the future. The writer of Hebrews says that *to those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation* (Hebrews 9:28). When Christ returns again, it will be

to take His children home with Him. At that point our salvation will be complete because we will be with Him at last!

By the way, did you happen to catch that those who were online that December 26th were able to *view* the quake and tsunami within minutes of it striking? Seismic stations picked up the magnitude of the event, and news stations spread the word electronically at the speed of light—which is more remarkable evidence that “*knowledge shall increase*” in the last days.

As fascinating as mankind’s rapid increase in knowledge can be, that is not God’s priority for His children in end times. Rather, we are to ... *increase and abound in love to one another ... so that He may establish [our] hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints* (1 Thessalonians 3:12–13). We need to continually make sure that our priorities are the same as God’s!

Are you ready to meet Jesus Christ? Is He your safe haven from the ominous “*things which are coming on the earth*”?

SATURDAY: Death Is Inevitable

... *It is **appointed for men to die** once, but after this the judgment* (Hebrews 9:27, emphasis added).

Even though “*knowledge shall increase*” as the Tribulation fast approaches, the knowledge of the exact moment of our “appointed” time to meet God face-to-face is His alone. And, unless the Rapture occurs first, we each must face the inevitability of our own death.

Jesus has warned us that life is fragile. Thus, He expects us to live every day as if it were our very last. Without even a moment’s notice we could be ushered into eternity—like all the souls who perished in the 2004 Tsunami.

The energy unleashed in that tsunami was staggering, but even more staggering is the fact that the 150,000-plus souls who unexpectedly entered eternity that day had no more chances to get right with a holy God! Thus, that event can serve as a gracious reminder from the Lord of what we are really here on earth to do—seek God while He may still be found!

Make a choice to live in hope. Do you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you are ready to meet Jesus? If you haven’t already done so, I urge you to choose to find hope for the end of days in Christ. Only He is a secure and safe refuge!

Week 5—Christ Is Our Refuge

(Revelation 1:4)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope in the
safest spot in the universe—Christ, our refuge!



SUNDAY: The Safest Spot

... *Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come ...*
(Revelation 1:4, emphasis added).

As Jesus graphically unfolded the events of the end of days before John's eyes, how did He prepare him for what was to come? He reminded him of His grace and peace. Now, as we see those very days actually unfolding before our own eyes, Christ wants to remind us that we, like John, are securely kept by His grace and peace as well.

Have you ever wondered where the safest spot on earth is *physically*? It is located in Colorado, a little over seven hundred miles from where I live in Tulsa, Oklahoma. There, nestled in the Rockies, under Cheyenne Mountain, a half-mile deep in its granite corridors, was a super-secure missile defense command center called NORAD.

Built at the height of the Cold War, the command center is able to withstand any bomb blast or chemical or biological weapon attack. Anyone residing within can be sustained for two years, but *only if he or she is able to get there in time to avoid the attack.*

The safest spot in the universe, even safer than Cheyenne Mountain, is also the closest. It is closer than any man-made shelter on earth. As we approach the end of days, the safest spot in the universe is in Christ, the perfect refuge *only* God could design.

Jesus Christ is our hope, our refuge, and our salvation. He is as close as a cry, an outstretched hand, or an upturned heart. He is only one thought or prayer away. From any location, anyone can instantly arrive in that safest of all places. That is our ultimate hope as we approach the end of days.

Christ, our forerunner, has forever anchored our souls safely in heaven, and in coming weeks we will see that Revelation explains what Hebrews 6 promises: ... *The heirs of promise ... **have fled for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek* (Hebrews 6:17–20, emphasis added).

When all else is shaken, only Christ is that secure and lasting refuge. But how do we reach that refuge? His Word says we are to ... *lay hold of the hope set before us* (Hebrews 6:18). What is that hope? It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (see 1 Timothy 1:1)! In other words, the safest spot in the universe is in the embrace of Jesus.

Are you resting in His embrace? That spot of safety is only a prayer away!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, we thank You that You've given us this beautiful book—the Revelation of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ—for this book speaks of Him from cover to cover. It is all about You, our hope, and we desire to lay hold of You. You are set before us in all Your glory, in all Your humility, and in all Your suffering in Your great work on the cross for us. I pray that we who know You will lay firmer hold on the hope set before us. For any who don't have this, may today be the day that they see Your arms open wide as You offer salvation to them. Oh Lord, bless us, strengthen us, encourage us, and draw us even closer to You! In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Entering the Refuge of Christ

[He] ... *is able to **keep you from stumbling**, and to **present you faultless** before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy* (Jude 24, emphasis added).

To understand one of the clearest explanations of entering into the refuge of Christ, let us look back 3,500 years. When Israel entered the Promised Land, God gave them a constant reminder of His salvation. This reminder was ordered by God to be set up throughout the land as a continual visible symbol of Him as God their Savior.

What was that visible reminder? It was a strategically placed group of six cities called “the cities of refuge.” *These were the **cities appointed for all** the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwelt among them, **that whoever** killed a person accidentally **might flee** there, and not die by the hand of **the avenger of blood** until he stood before the congregation* (Joshua 20:9, emphasis added).

The cities of refuge present a clear, but often overlooked, picture of Christ as Savior. In those Old Testament passages describing the cities of refuge, the word for “refuge” used in the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek version of the Old Testament) is the same as the Greek word translated “refuge” in Hebrews 6:18 (KJV, NKJV, and NASB). The writer of Hebrews is telling us that

the only way to experience the power of God that saves us is to run to Christ in desperation for refuge—to that safest place.

The cities of refuge were wonderful because:

- **The cities of refuge were easy to reach.** Jewish tradition declares that there were signs at the crossroads: Refuge! Refuge! These signs pointed the way to safety. God expressly commanded that roads be made to these cities to make them highly accessible (Deuteronomy 19:3). Some were even located on hilltops in order to be more prominent.
- **The cities of refuge were open to all.** To the Israelite, the stranger, and the sojourner among them (Numbers 35:15). Joshua 20:9 uses this phrase: *“that whoever killed a person.”* What New Testament verse does *“that whoever”* remind us of? Right! *“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, **that whoever** believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16, emphasis added.)
- **The cities of refuge were always open.** If that were not the case, a man might be killed while beating on a door to get someone to let him in.
- **The cities of refuge were completely sufficient refuges.** They not only provided legal protection but also completely met an endangered person’s needs once inside. As long as the slayer remained in the city, he was safe, and could look forward to being freed after the high priest died.
- **The cities of refuge were the only hope.** The slayer was told to *flee* to the city; such a person could not afford to delay.

Christ Himself is your only hope and refuge! Can you afford to delay fleeing to Him for eternal safety?

TUESDAY: The Cities of Refuge—A Portrait of Christ

*... We might have strong consolation, **who have fled for refuge** to lay hold of the hope set before us* (Hebrews 6:18b, emphasis added).

The similarities between the cities of refuge and Christ our refuge are striking when compared point for point. Anyone can come to Christ because:

- **Christ is easy to reach.** We may cast ourselves upon Christ at any time, in any place. His church is to be the teller of this good news that cries “Refuge! Refuge!”

to the lost world. This emphasis is made at the very end of Revelation: ... *Let him who thirsts come ...* (Revelation 22:17b). The Savior is within the reach of all, even to those who are in the utmost peril of His wrath.

- **Christ is open to all people.** Anyone who wants to may come to Him: “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ...*” (Matthew 11:28; see also Genesis 3:9 and Isaiah 45:22).
- **Christ’s arms are always open—He never locks His gates.** Jesus is “the door” (John 10:7, 9), and that door is never shut. Many have stood by a deathbed and seen sinners come to belief in the last moments of life. There is no gate to unlock, and men can enter quickly. The way to the heavenly city of refuge is clear, and Christ will never turn any sinner away (John 6:37). Just as prominent roads led to each city of refuge, and their gates were always open, so Christ’s gate is always open to whoever will come to Him.
- **Christ is a completely sufficient refuge.** “Christ’s death in space-time history is completely adequate to meet our need for refuge from the true moral guilt that we have. It is final because of who He is. He is the infinite second person of the Trinity; therefore, His death has infinite value. Just as the suburbs or borders of the city [of refuge] were a sufficient security to the offender (Numbers 35:26–27)—so there is virtue even in the hem of Christ’s garment for the healing and saving of poor sinners. If we cannot reach to a full assurance, we may comfort ourselves in a good hope through grace.”¹
- **Christ is our only hope.** If we do not flee to the refuge, which God has given to us at such a great price, there is no other hope for us. Hebrews relates this negative emphasis to the Old Testament: *Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment ... will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?* (Hebrews 10:28–29).

There isn’t one of us who does not stand in that situation. We have heard the gospel, so if in the Old Testament ignoring God’s law brought death, what about us if we despise the work of Christ and the grace which He showers upon us? Nor can lost sinners today afford to delay in fleeing to the only refuge, Jesus Christ.²

Today, meditate upon these soul-gripping truths: Christ is easy to reach; His arms are open to all; His entrance is never locked; He is a completely sufficient refuge; and He is the only hope! How wonderful!

WEDNESDAY: Christ—Better Than Any City of Refuge

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”
(Matthew 11:28, emphasis added).

Why is Christ better than any earthly city of refuge? While those cities were only for temporary refuge, Christ offers only permanent refuge. Even though the cities of refuge were strategically placed to be easy to reach, because of angry relatives, they could still only be reached after a hard and dangerous journey. Christ, however, can only be reached through simple childlike faith in His sacrifice on the cross, which makes Him forever closer than any man-made refuge.

Christ is *so much* better because He died only for the guilty, but the cities of refuge protected only the innocent. They were reserved for the man who killed by mistake. When the slayer came to the city, he was admitted and then tried, for the elders of the city only protected someone who was innocent of murder. With us, there is no trial. We are already condemned in our sins, but Christ welcomes and receives guilty sinners. What grace!

Christ died for the deliberate sinner. Who is that? Every one of us can say, “It is I!” How can a holy and righteous God accept those who are guilty? It is not by giving up His holiness; He does not devalue that, or we would have no moral absolute in the universe. Rather, the reason Christ is able to be our Redeemer is that He is the High Priest, and the sacrifice He gave was His own death. Now, think about your life today in these terms: Christ is my refuge—Jesus found me guilty in God’s court and convicted me of first-degree sin. Because I am a sinner, God’s penalty (or wages) for my sin is death. But instead of forgetting my debt to God’s holiness, it was paid in full by another. Jesus died in my place, bearing my sin. That payment made me free.

Because of Christ’s death in my place, I will never face God’s wrath. Now I can boldly come before God’s throne and, surrounded by His mercy and grace, find all that I need to live life and serve Him. When I sin, I have a Savior who is also my High Priest who actually lives to speak to God on my behalf. It is this powerful picture of Christ that Paul taught the Corinthians: *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come* (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Christ, our High Priest, died once for all, and lives forever. Although we are legally guilty before God, when we cast ourselves upon Christ we are free forever. (Hebrews 7:23–27 says this strongly.) When you humbly come to Christ with a repentant heart, His arms will open wide! If you have not already done so, I urge you to accept His embrace and start living for Him today!

THURSDAY: Christ—Our Permanent Refuge

*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, emphasis added).

Hebrews also speaks of Christ as *the forerunner who has entered for us* (Hebrews 6:20). Christ has entered into God's presence so that we can enter too. When do we enter this refuge?

We enter in **once for all** at the moment we cast ourselves upon Christ and accept Him as our Savior. At that moment we are declared justified by God who judges us on the basis of Christ's finished work at Calvary: ... *We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom **we have now received the reconciliation*** (Romans 5:11, emphasis added). In that verse, Paul uses the Greek aorist tense, which indicates that our justification is a past thing, completed forever. If we *were* saved, we *are* saved. Justification (and its subset, reconciliation) means that God has no record that we ever sinned. Our sins are paid for, put on Christ's account, and are gone forever!

We enter **every daily moment** into this refuge as Christians when we claim the blood of Christ to cover specific sin that has broken fellowship with God: ... *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses us from all sin**. ... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:7, 9, emphasis added).

We will enter in **perfectly and completely** at that great moment when we die, or when the Lord returns: ... *He is also able to **save to the uttermost** those who come to God through Him ...* (Hebrews 7:25, emphasis added).

Christ is better than any city of refuge because He is nearer. A man from the city who ran out to help a weary refugee to the gate could fall and not be able to shelter him within the walls of safety before the avenger overtook the fugitive. But a man who looks to Christ to reach safety can never fail. The Bible makes a specific promise: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). In fact, Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:20). He Himself seeks us.³

Have you come to Jesus Christ by faith and allowed Him to save you once for all? If so, you can rest in Christ, for He is your permanent and only refuge!

FRIDAY: Are You 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, emphasis added).

How near is Christ? To answer that, let me share the following story that was told by Harry A. Ironside (1876–1951), who traveled for more than fifty years as a home missionary, evangelist, and

Bible teacher. He was pastor of Moody Memorial Church, a visiting professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, and the author of more than sixty books and pamphlets. The following is drawn from a tract he wrote called “The Way of Peace.” The essence of the story is that a pastor named Dr. Charles Berry served a congregation in Boston. He was part of the movement that denied the deity of Christ, His substitutionary death on the cross, and the need of personal salvation. But he was immensely popular to the people of Boston. He could hold vast audiences with his story-telling abilities, and everyone always felt better when they left the service.

Those who knew him well noted that at the height of his ministry, there was a dramatic change in his life. When asked to explain the amazing changes he had experienced, he told them the story. It started on a rainy Saturday night. Dr. Berry was in his study at home, just finishing up a moving message for the next morning, when the doorbell rang. Opening the door, he saw a poor, hungry teen standing on his porch. She asked for the minister. Dr. Berry tried to send her to the local relief agencies and rescue missions—but she insisted that a minister needed to come with her.

Finally, at the point of embarrassment, Dr. Berry agreed to go out into the stormy night, following this young lady, totally against his better judgment. It was the event that followed that the Lord used to change his life forever.

As they walked, the young lady kept repeating over and over that she needed a minister to “get her mother in.” Not sure exactly what she meant, Dr. Berry followed. He wondered if she was sick or had fallen or, even worse, was in some state of intoxication that she needed to be carried. When suggesting that it might be better to get a policeman to help, the young lady again repeated, “No, I need a minister to get my mother in!”

At last Dr. Berry began to understand as the young lady explained that her mother was not drunk but afraid to die. She then explained that she had assured her mother that she would find a minister, and the minister would explain to her how to get in—to heaven! At that point Dr. Berry slowed down. He asked if he could send a local inner-city missionary or someone from the rescue mission. The trembling daughter looked at him so intently and begged him to wait no longer. She said again:

“Do come, sir. I want you to get my mother in before it’s too late. Please, sir, do come with me.”

At last he consented to go, and the girl led the way to one of the worst sections of the city. In this miserable neighborhood she took him into a tenement house and up a rickety flight of stairs to a poverty-stricken room. Downstairs many men and women were drinking and carousing, and the air resounded with horrid oaths and vile language. The minister found the poor woman lying on a miserable makeshift of a bed, evidently near to death.

“I’ve brought him!” exclaimed the daughter. “I’ve got the minister from the big church where the swells go. He’ll get you in, Mother. Just do what he says.”

“What can I do for you, my poor woman?” he inquired as kindly as he could.

“Why, sir, I’m dying, and I want you to get me into heaven. I’ve been a great sinner, and I don’t know how to get in.”

The minister began to speak of the necessity of a good life, of building a noble character, and how goodness always paid in the end.

“You don’t understand, sir!” she cried. “That won’t do! I’m dying and I’ve lived a bad life. It’s too late for me. Oh, can’t you get me in?”

He tried again and gave some good advice and endeavored to comfort her by expressing the hope that all would be well if she would only seek to lead a Christian life.

“That won’t do!” she exclaimed. “I’m a poor sinner! I’ve no time to lead a Christian life. I’m dying and I want to go in. Oh, can’t you tell me how I may get into heaven?”

Dr. Berry did not know what to say or how to comfort her. At last he thought, “Why not tell her what my mother used to tell me? Why not give her some of the simple texts and Gospel stories I learned as a child?”

With this in mind he began to repeat some of the precious Gospel verses telling of God’s love for sinners and of the Savior who had died to redeem. The woman listened eagerly. “That’s it! That ought to get me in, shouldn’t it! Did he die for sinners? Then that should get me in.”

Stirred to the depths of his own being he told the story of the cross as he had not preached it for years. Like a thirsty soul, she drank in the living water. Finally, he knelt and prayed with her.

She trusted Christ for herself. Her fears were allayed and she entered into peace.

“Jowett,” said Dr. Berry years afterward, “I helped get her in that night, and while I was helping to get her in, I got myself in also!”⁴

Are you in? If not, I exhort you to bow before Him this moment; believe on Jesus and freely receive His salvation!

SATURDAY: Christ’s Wonderful Benefits

“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, emphasis added).

Once you are in the safe arms of Jesus, what will you find? You will find the perfect refuge, the One who has so much to offer all of us. The six cities of refuge named in Joshua 20:7–9 are representative of six truths for those who flee to Christ, the safest place in the universe.

Each of the following Hebrew words that name the cities of refuge speak of one powerful facet of Christ’s present ministry to us:

- **Kedesh** means a “holy place” or “righteousness.” Christ is our “holy place” and our “righteousness.” He is the only refuge for us when we feel unclean, defiled, or guilty. (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- **Shechem** means “shoulder.” Christ is our safe and strong “shoulder.” He is the only refuge for us when we feel weary, exhausted, or stressed. (Matthew 11:28–30)
- **Hebron** means “fellowship.” Christ is the only refuge for the lonely who feel left out, left behind, homeless, or forsaken. (John 14:21)
- **Bezer** means a “stronghold” or “fortress.” Christ is our “stronghold,” or “fortress.” He is the only refuge for us when we feel helpless, fearful, and powerless. (Matthew 28:18)
- **Ramoth** means “exalted” or “heights.” Christ is the only refuge for us when our hearts darken and we feel hopeless. (Ephesians 2:6)
- **Golan** means “separated.” Christ is the only refuge for us when we struggle and feel weak when we are tempted. (Hebrews 4:16)

Make a choice to live in hope. Each of these city names portray details of the refuge Christ offers for us to lay hold of every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives. Jesus is the closest, safest, and only refuge we can turn to when we are unclean, weary, homeless, helpless, hopeless, tempted, and fearful.

Week 6—Remember Christ's Blood

(Revelation 1:5–8)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you remember Christ's blood that has washed away your sins!



SUNDAY: The Cleansing Power of Christ's Blood

*... Jesus Christ ... loved us and **washed us from our sins in His own blood**, ... to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen* (Revelation 1:5–6, emphasis added).

The blood of Christ has loosed us from our sins. Why do we need that power? From the dark hour of the Fall in the splendors of the Garden of Eden, every man, woman, and child has since been chained by the bondage of sin—stained by an indelible mark that grips our very souls. All pain, decay, fear, sorrow, death, and evil in our world traces its origins back to that very moment.

In the Bible, one of the pictures or metaphors for sin is found in the oldest and most feared of all diseases in history—leprosy. My first exposure to this feared disease occurred in a third-world country while riding a city bus through the squalor of the slum dwellers. In a billowing cloud of high-sulfur diesel, smoldering garbage, and filthy, dirt-laden air, we jerked to a stop as an oxcart lumbered across the road. Out of the corner of my eye a movement toward the bus caught my attention. A beggar pulled back his rag shawl that draped his shoulders and, in desperation, ran up to my slightly open window. Flinging his frail body at the bus, now just starting up again, he thrust a hand into the window. At least it used to be a hand: an oozing, ulcerated, gangrenous stump was all that remained. There in the window but for a moment, yet its image is indelibly burned into my mind.

Leprosy is the first disease recorded in the Bible. It is found in the mummified bodies of Egypt's tombs. It was a horror in Israel, as Luke records: "*And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian*" (Luke 4:27).

What we know today as Hansen's Disease is terrible as it ravages the human body. A natural response to leprosy is revulsion. Lepers were ostracized and feared. They were under penalty of death, kept outside of the camp or city, and were to be avoided as unclean. God then used the disease's physical disfigurement, and the resulting ceremonial uncleanness, as a spiritual illustration. Leprosy is a vivid and graphic physical picture of the spiritual defilement of sin.

It is in this context that the power of Jesus is so beautifully seen: *Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him ..., "If You are willing, You can make me clean"* (Mark 1:40). Just as Christ's power could heal that leper physically, so His power can wash us and loose us from our sin. All we will ever need was accomplished by the inestimable, infinite, power of the blood of Christ.

The New Testament details these powerful truths of salvation that are directly tied to the blood of Christ: His blood, our **forgiveness**, powerfully paid the penalty of our **past sin**; His blood, our **victory**, absolutely defeats the power of our **present sin**; and His blood, our **security**, totally secures us from the presence of our **future sin**.

There is power in the blood of Christ: power to cleanse, change, and keep us—power to redeem, restore, and renew us. It is all the power of God's amazing grace in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus as He poured out His blood on the cross.

Jesus has taken care of our **past lives**. Christ has the power to purchase us (Acts 20:28), to remove God's wrath from us (Romans 3:25), to justify us (Romans 5:9), and to scrub our minds clean (Hebrews 9:14).

Jesus is taking care of our **present lives**. Christ has the power to liberate us (Ephesians 1:7), to cleanse our sins (1 John 1:7), and to loose us from sin's grip (Revelation 1:5).

Jesus will also take care of our **future lives**. Christ has given us the power to experience fellowship with Him (1 Corinthians 10:16), to know His intimacy (Ephesians 2:13), to have His peace (Colossians 1:20), to enter God's presence (Hebrews 10:19), to live His life (Hebrews 13:20-21), and to live obediently (1 Peter 1:2).

Jesus is a wonderful Savior! For truly, there is power in the blood of Christ!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord, we pray that You will open this precious portion of Your Word to us! May the blood of Jesus Christ Your Son, shed to take away our sin, and to loose us from the bondage of sin, be the focus of our worship to You throughout this week. In His precious name, the lovely name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Saving Power of Christ's Blood

... *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:7, emphasis added).

Jesus is the refuge for the unclean. There is no sin He cannot forgive; there is no stain He cannot remove; there is no failure He cannot forget. The leper in Mark 1:40-42 understood this well when he implored Jesus, *"If You are willing, You can make me clean."* Jesus, moved with

compassion, touched him, and immediately he was cleansed. Jesus was the perfect refuge for this unclean leper!

Physically, leprosy is awful. Leprosy was the scourge of the ancient world. Nothing evoked more fear, more dread, or more revulsion than the sight of these “walking dead.”

Spiritually, leprosy is a vivid and graphic picture of the dreadful power of sin. The instructions given to the priests in Leviticus 13 help us better understand the true nature of sin:

Sin, like leprosy, is inside us, deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3) and cannot be helped by mere “surface” measures (see Jer. 6:14). Sin also spreads just like leprosy (Lev. 13:8). Sin always defiles (Lev. 13:45–46). People with leprosy were looked on as “dead” (Num. 12:12). Because of his defilement, a leprous person had to be isolated outside the camp (Lev. 13:46), so lost sinners one day will be isolated in hell. And just as leprous garments are fit only for the fire (Lev. 13:52, 57), so those who die while clothed in sin will burn forever. How important it is for lost sinners to trust Jesus Christ and get rid of their “leprosy”!¹

We are all born infected with the sin virus that remains in our system. Like leprosy, sin becomes a part of every fiber of our life. It infects our every thought, motivation, word, and deed. Sin cannot be removed on our own; only Jesus Christ can loose us from its infection by thoroughly washing us in His blood.

The blood of Jesus Christ took a “leprous” man like John Newton and transformed him into one of the most respected men of his generation in eighteenth-century England. History notes that he had Alzheimer’s disease before he died. In the last two years of his life, as he lay in bed, many of the notable people of England would come to visit him. Newton had lost his ability to remember except for one thing. He would tell his visitors, “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things; That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.”

Christ’s blood has the same power to cleanse and transform “leprous” men and women in our twenty-first-century world. Jesus Christ, through His blood, paid the *penalty* of sin, has broken the *power* of sin, and will eliminate the *presence* of sin. What a wonderful Savior!

TUESDAY: The Liberating Power of Christ's Blood

... Jesus Christ ... loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood (Revelation 1:5 NIV, emphasis added).

Sin is like barnacles that stick to your soul unless they are removed by one property in the universe: the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Listen to the testimony of one who experienced the amazing cleansing power of Christ’s blood that liberated him from a life of sin:

Who am I? My godly mother died when I was a young child. Reared by a sea-captain father, taken to sea at age eleven, I soon forgot the Scriptures she had taught me.

Several years later, I was pressed into the British navy and became a midshipman. By then I had earned the reputation of being able to curse for two hours straight without repeating a word. Restless and wild, I tried to desert, was caught, stripped, whipped severely, and degraded to the ranks. I eventually ran away to Africa, but only so “I might sin my fill.” And I did.

Debauched and distant from God, I fell into the hands of a Portuguese slave trader. For months the chief woman of the trader’s harem treated me like an animal, beating me and forcing me to grovel in the dirt for my food.

Reduced to a mangy cur of a man, I finally escaped and made my way to the shores of Africa. Picked up by a passing ship I earned the position of first mate because I was a skilled navigator. But while the captain was ashore one day, I broke out the ship’s rum and got the entire crew drunk. When the captain came back, he was so furious he hit me, knocking me overboard.

I would have drowned were it not for a sailor who pulled me back on board by spearing my thigh with a boat hook. The wound was so large that it left a scar big enough to put my fist in. Some weeks later, when the ship neared the coast of Scotland, it sailed into a storm and almost sank. For days I manned the pumps below deck in what seemed a hopeless nightmare.

It was then that I desperately called out to God. He answered my helpless cry, and I emerged from the hold of that ship to later become the chaplain of England’s Parliament and even to preach before the king. I am the vile blasphemer whom many would subsequently refer to as the second founder of the Church of England. And it was I who wrote:

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

These were the lyrics born out of my wayward, free-versed life. And to my ears, there is no sweeter sound than grace in all the world. Who am I? John Newton.²

“Amazing Grace” has become a beloved part of American culture. The song speaks of the amazing grace of God the Father who sent God the Son down to earth to become a sacrifice, to actually shed His own blood for each of us. I hope that you are clinging to the blood of Jesus as your only hope and assurance for the cleansing of your sin!

WEDNESDAY: The Deleting Power of Christ's Blood

*In Him we have **redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace* (Ephesians 1:7, emphasis added).

Because I want you to really understand how wonderfully Jesus' blood has met our deepest need, today we will study the theology of the blood of Christ. Consider again just what it is that He has done for us: "... *I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more*" (Hebrews 8:12).

Christ's blood has the power to purchase us: [Overseers] ... *shepherd the church of God which He **purchased with His own blood*** (Acts 20:28, emphasis added). In Greek, that word "purchased" is *peripoieo*, which means "obtained for himself." Jesus bought us for Himself and has taken care of our past lives—defective, defiled, and stained as they were. He bought us just like we were. That is incredible love and mercy!

Christ's blood has the power to remove God's wrath from us: ... *God set forth [Jesus] as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed ...* (Romans 3:25). "Propitiation is all that the Old Testament expiation [covering and putting away of sin] was, and very importantly, "THE PACIFYING OF THE WRATH OF GOD THEREBY." It is the quenching of God's wrath against us by obliterating our sins from His Holy sight."³ In the Old Testament, God passed over all the endless sacrifices that never took away sins because He knew that Jesus would one day pay the ultimate price with His blood.

Christ's blood has the power to justify us: ... *Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him* (Romans 5:9). In justification, a sinner stands before God as the accused and is declared free (Romans 8:33).⁴ It is like standing accused at a tribunal before the judge of the universe and being declared not guilty. We *are* guilty; we committed those sins, but Jesus steps up and says, "Not guilty! I took the penalty." God the Father then imputes His Son's righteousness to the sinner's account (Romans 4:11b).

Justification is an outside or external event that changes our standing before God: ... *Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1). Justification does not make us personally righteous; sanctification does that (Romans 3:28). The end result of justification is that we have eternal peace with God, and endless life with Him that can never be taken away from or lost by us.

Christ's blood has the power to scrub our minds clean: *How much more shall the blood of Christ ... cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* (Hebrews 9:14). He will cleanse us of memories of sins that we have committed, pictures of things we should not have seen, feelings that we should not have felt, and all those things that were leading us to death and drying up the vitality of our lives. In other words, God has the power to scrub our consciences clean so that we do not persist in a self-defeating guilt life in which so many Christians live (also see Hebrews 10:22).

Every time Satan comes with his two-edged sword of doubt and discouragement, and you feel helpless and guilty (thinking you've done something one too many times and God is not going to forgive you), you can resist Satan by reciting these truths: *Jesus has already died for my sins; they are paid for; I am forgiven; God has forever accepted me in Christ—and my earthly life is daily catching up, bit by bit, to that eternally settled reality!* (See Galatians 2:20.)

Jesus has removed guilt—the curse and sting of sin. However, when we sin and offend God, He wants us to acknowledge that sin so He can cleanse us. We are to confess it to God, and not try to “work it off” by flailing ourselves with guilt. According to 1 John 1:9, it is as simple as saying: “I confess; I agree with You that I committed that sin, and thank You that Your blood cleanses me.”

God wants to clean out everything that fuels defeat in your life. For sin to defeat you, you have to keep feeding those memories by remembering them. It is not that the memories will be totally forgotten, but that through Christ's blood their power to disable, discourage, and defeat you will be broken. If you are struggling with guilt feelings, I exhort you to ask God to scrub your mind clean!

THURSDAY: The Securing Power of Christ's Blood

*... He is ... able to **save to the uttermost** those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. ... Having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ...* (Hebrews 7:25; 10:21).

What security it is to be owned by Christ! In the Levitical system, people were kept outside of God's presence, but believers can now boldly draw near to God! Because we have a High Priest who intercedes for us before the Father's throne, we are wonderfully saved “*to the uttermost*”—and are eternally secure through the power of Christ's blood.

Christ's blood has the power to liberate us: *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace* (Ephesians 1:7). Redemption could be described as “when I stood before God as a slave and He bought me from the slave market of sin.” This is present power to liberate us from our sins. Have you experienced this today?

Christ's blood has the power to allow us to experience Him daily: *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* (1 Corinthians 10:16). In the Greek, the word “communion” is *koinonia*, or fellowship. “It is the blood that unites us into perfect fellowship. In the book of Acts, this is seen by the use of the term “brethren” over forty times. It describes those who share a common heritage, like citizens of the same country, though it carries the additional force of brethren born of the same Spirit, when applied to Christians.” [Acts 1:16; 6:3; 9:17; etc.] In brief, disciples must have devoted Christian friends to follow, and this can only be facilitated by being together over a period of time.”⁵

Christ's blood has the power to draw us near: ... *In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ* (Ephesians 2:13). Christ's blood has the power to let us experience intimacy with God—to *know Him* personally. Do you know Him so well that any lack of fellowship with Him grieves your heart? Do you know Him so well that you look forward to meeting with Him daily? People are creatures of habit: most get up early, have a cup of coffee, and read the newspaper to see what is going on in the world. But if we love Jesus, we should begin our day by reading God's Word and seeking intimate fellowship with Him—the One who so greatly loves us and wants to spend time with us!

Christ's blood has the power to give His peace: *For it pleased the Father ... by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, ... having made peace through the blood of His cross* (Colossians 1:19–20). When we are still in our sin, God is at war with us. So the Father wants to reconcile us to Himself by giving us peace *with* God (no guilt over the past) and *of* God (no anxiety for the future). When we accept the sacrifice of Christ, His justice is satisfied, and we become at peace with Him. The more we get to know God intimately, the more we can then experience the peace of Jesus, *which surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7)!

As you meditate upon today's verses, Christ will open God's presence to you so that you may live in the power of His blood!

FRIDAY: The Providing Power of Christ's Blood

*... Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, **for obedience** and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ ...* (1 Peter 1:2, emphasis added).

Have you ever considered that the blood of Jesus Christ provides the power to live obediently? If you are a genuine, born-again saint of God, according to 1 Peter 1:2, you can live obediently because God provides the way to do so. Every time you disobey Him, He won't strike you in punishment, and you don't have to somehow *earn* His forgiveness. God bought you in Christ in spite of knowing your liabilities. He knows not only what you have done in the past but also everything you will do in the future. God loves you *unconditionally*!

Christ's blood has the power to cleanse you and loose you from its grip: ... *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:7). Jesus can cleanse every sin in the past, present, or future because of His once-and-for-all sacrifice on the cross. For He *loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood ...* (Revelation 1:5). His blood sacrifice provided the power to break the hold of any sin!

Christ's blood has the power to elicit our proper response: ... *"God be merciful to me, a sinner!"* (Luke 18:13). The loveliest picture I know of Christ's forgiveness is the story of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, deserted by her companion in sin, and dragged before Jesus. John 8:3 tells us that *The scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in*

adultery. And ... set her in the midst ... (emphasis added). The word “set” connotes “throwing down or dumping.” This woman was literally dumped in front of Jesus!

Next, they said to Jesus, ... *“Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?”* (John 8:4–5). Apart from Christ, this is how all of us are in God’s presence. We are guilty, vile, helpless, and hopeless. We are crumpled before Him, unable to look up because the Law points out every sin we have committed, and our accusers scream that we deserve death.

Jesus insightfully told the accusers that whoever was without sin should throw the first stone at the woman. After they departed, one by one, with no one left to condemn her, Jesus compassionately said, *“Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more”* (see John 8:6–11).

This incident clearly reveals the difference between how Satan and Jesus want to treat us: Satan’s goal is *“... to steal, and to kill, and to destroy ...”* (John 10:10a), while Jesus, who forgives and does not condemn, desires that we *“may have life, and ... have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10b). Our proper response to Jesus Christ is to thus cry out: What a Savior—*To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.* (Revelation 1:6b)!

SATURDAY: New Beginnings by Christ’s Blood

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him And all ... will mourn because of Him. ... “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:7–8).

Are you ready to meet this Jesus—the almighty God who is coming soon? You will be if you let Him *“... give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; ... and cause you to walk in [His] statutes ...”* (Ezekiel 36:26–27, emphasis added).

God’s Word offers a life of new beginnings. The ultimate new beginning is called the new birth, or being born again by God’s Word. Being born a second time is the ultimate new beginning because you get to start life completely over again—like the woman caught in adultery.

Christ’s blood gives us a new beginning in our assurance of God’s complete forgiveness. In Christ, rather than crumpling before Him with the law pointing out all our sins, the law becomes our delight: *Let Your tender mercies come to me ... for Your law is my delight* (Psalm 119:77). The words “tender mercies” remind us that none of us get what we deserve. That is what mercy is all about. Grace is getting the undeserved favor of God; mercy is not getting the rightly deserved punishment of God. When God is merciful, He is withholding what we deserve. *“For Your law is my delight”* translates into “As I read Your Book, I realize that You have made provision for my sins.”

Here is the good news of salvation: *The only thing that you and I have to give to God is our sins.* We don’t have anything good enough to give to God. So He says to us, “Do you know that you are a guilty sinner? Then give Me your sins, and let Me put them upon Christ!” He became sin for us, so we can now say: “I have a new beginning in my assurance of God. Because of Your

tender mercies, You are withholding Your wrath from me. That has revived me that I may live, for Your law is my delight!"

Christ's blood gives us a new beginning in praise: *Let my soul live, and it shall praise You ...* (Psalm 119:175). "*Let my soul live*" simply means "Let my soul be energized to worship You!" Instead of being dead in our sins, like the "walking dead" of the leper colonies, we are alive in Christ who gives us new life. He revives us so that we can praise Him!

Can you, with all your being, worship, magnify, and praise the Lord? If not, you need a new beginning. The good news is that the Lord Jesus Christ says to you, "You don't have to live with a hard heart. You don't have to live with a sin-stained heart. You don't have to live in despair—feeling hopeless, helpless, and having no purpose in life. My power is ever-present to provide a new beginning for you!"

Make a choice to live in hope. When you are born again, you become ... *a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new* (2 Corinthians 5:17). And through the power of Christ's blood, God wants to give you:

- A new beginning in the Word.
- A new beginning in love.
- A new beginning in obedience.
- A new beginning in repentance.
- A new beginning in spiritual renewal.
- A new beginning in the assurance of God.
- A new beginning in trusting the Lord.
- A new beginning in boldness.
- A new beginning in understanding God's plan.
- A new beginning in the only lasting help.
- A new beginning in hope for your troubles.
- A new beginning in strength.
- A new beginning in patience.
- A new beginning in praise.
- A new beginning in what is truly worth living for!

Not only do we have a new beginning in this lifetime—one of hope as we face the end days—but also soon, very soon, we will experience the ultimate new beginning! For Jesus tells us that "*God will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying [or] pain, for the former things have passed away.*" Then He who [sits] on the throne [will say], "*Behold, I make all things new*" (Revelation 21:4–5a).

Are you ready to meet Him? Are you safely "under the blood of Christ"? There is wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb! Oh, how I pray that the words of this great song will bring as much joy to your heart as they do to mine!

There Is Power in the Blood

*Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.*

*Would you be free from your passion and pride?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide;
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.*

*Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Sin stains are lost in its life-giving flow;
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.*

*Would you do service for Jesus your King?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Would you live daily His praises to sing?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.*

Refrain:

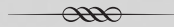
*There is pow'r, pow'r, Wonder-working pow'r
In the blood of the Lamb; There is pow'r, pow'r,
Wonder-working pow'r In the precious blood of the Lamb.*

—Lewis E. Jones, 1865–1936

Week 7—Find Hope in Christ's Majesty

(Revelation 1:9)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you discover Christ's majesty!



SUNDAY: When You Feel Abandoned

*I, John, ... **was on the island** ... called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ* (Revelation 1:9, emphasis added).

John felt alone when he was exiled to Patmos, but Christ became nearer to him then than he had ever experienced before. The more of Christ's majesty that we too experience, the nearer He will become to us so that we can walk securely in hope at the end of days.

John was not the first of God's servants to feel alone and in need of Christ's majestic presence. Three thousand years ago, another of God's faithful servants had that same hope. His name was David, and his life is the single most-recorded life (over 140 chapters) in God's Word. As we look at David's life, we will discover how to find living hope for anything we may face ourselves.

Everything was going so well for David for a long time: after defeating Goliath, he became worship leader for the king, a great warrior, a member of the king's cabinet, and the king's son-in-law. But then everything fell apart.

In the lives of believers, there can come a point so low that we actually feel that everyone, even God, has abandoned us. That is how David felt in Psalm 13. In Psalm 13 we see that Christ cannot be our refuge if we do not hear His invitation to flee to Him, or if we do not even remember He is there. Sometimes we have to hit bottom, go through dark waters, or face incredible convulsions in our lives to see Him, even though He's been with us all the time.

I learned that lesson well at 27,000 feet. While flying home from a Shepherds Conference in Los Angeles, I received an insight I will never forget. Having flown enough to have heard the pre-flight safety lecture dozens of times, I usually read and ignore it all, never thinking about anything other than what I need to do before we land.

This particular flight was uneventful. I had an empty seat beside me that became my desk, and as the world slowly drifted by outside my window, I worked. After a bit, clouds began to darken the sky, and I had to turn on the light to see, but I kept on studying.

Suddenly a reminder to fasten seatbelts caught my attention. I began to listen intently when the plane did its first roller-coaster move. Soon we were dropping, and then we were going straight up like an elevator. After that, a very hard jolt knocked open a few overhead compartments and things fell out. Throughout the plane, there were some scattered cries of fear.

From that moment on, all I thought about was this: *Who exactly is up front flying this plane? How much experience does he have? How skilled is he in thunderstorm management?*

What tremendous lesson did I learn about flying? That we don't pay much attention if all goes smoothly. After all, who gives the pilot a thought unless the weather gets rough? But when the world around us jolts, jumps, rocks, and swerves unexpectedly, all we can think about then is this: *Who is steering this careening machine?* We are forced to realize how important the pilot really is, and that our lives are in his hands.

The same is true in our spiritual lives: the fewer bumps, the more we ignore the pilot, our Lord. The smoother the ride, the more we forget the One whose hands hold our lives. But let the rough family times come, the roller-coaster ride of our emotions, the crash of our finances, or the sudden plummet of our health, and then we think about the pilot.

David experienced many a bumpy ride in his lifetime, and at times even became fearful, but consistently he chose to put his trust in the pilot of his life. As we continue to focus on how to find living hope for the end of days, we can learn a lot from how David handled his tribulation periods, especially during times of great loneliness.

After the Lord rescued him from Gath (1 Samuel 21:10-15), David fled to the wilderness and lived in a cave. (Compare 1 Samuel 22:1-5 with Psalm 57 and 142.) During his cave time, David went through a period of feeling abandoned by God. But in that dark hour he found hope. How did he do that? Troubles, trials, tests, and temptations always pushed David toward the Lord. God was his choice; God was his habit; God was his desire because David supremely loved the Lord with all his heart. Those dark times simply exposed the reality, deep down in his soul, that David had entrusted his life to the Lord.

Throughout the Psalms, David made confessions about the pilot who was flying his plane during the turbulent and stormy skies of his life. As you go through this week, I pray that you will discover, like David, that even if you happen to feel abandoned right now—God is still there flying you safely through!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, I pray that we would cultivate those holy habits energized by Your Holy Spirit that make us useful. Make us those who want to give our lives back to You. May even our habits revolve around You so that we are disciplined, trustworthy, responsible, and obedient. We want to be energized by Your Spirit to honestly say, "Lord, I'm Your servant." We are a testimony, an advertisement. What are we advertising? Anything that is out of control—be it our tongue,*

our finances, or our calendar—is just a testimony that You are not in control of that part of our lives. Help us to not think so highly of ourselves that we do not put everything under Your Lordship. May every part of our lives honor You, and testify that we are Your servants. For that is what we want to be. Jesus, Lord, be our Master; hear our hearts as we whisper back to You. For we give ourselves to You in the name of Jesus. Amen.

MONDAY: Common Causes for Cave Times

*We are **hard-pressed on every side**, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair ...* (2 Corinthians 4:8, emphasis added).

As a pastor, biblical counselor, and a follower of Christ for over forty years, I am convinced that feelings of abandonment are very common among believers, no matter how mature they might be in the Lord. Both the apostles John and David knew what it was like to feel alone and in desperate need of Christ's presence. Look at David's opening words in Psalm 13:1–2: *How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*

David experienced many such cave times, and it is likely that we will also. What are some common causes of cave times—those periods in life when we feel utterly abandoned by others as well as God?

Cave times may start through a protracted illness that seems to never end, when strength never comes, when future plans fade, and so does hope. If hope is lost, uncontrolled emotions can wreak havoc not only in the ill person's life but also in the lives of his or her family.

Another common cause for feeling abandoned is a sudden loss of income, when financial needs become difficult, and eventually seem overwhelming. This type of trial can place a great deal of stress on a marriage and family. So can a demanding and unreasonable boss, a grueling and unending schedule, or a jealous, spiteful, and injurious coworker. Wayward children also cause immeasurable pain to believing parents, as does an alcoholic or abusive spouse, or unsaved family members.

Usually, times like these make us feel that no one really cares about us. So more and more we start to feel rejected by others, which then starts the downward spiral into thinking that God has abandoned us as well. David experienced such a depth of feeling abandoned that in Psalm 13 he cried out to God as if he could no longer hang on.

Amazingly, there is little said or written in Christian literature about helping believers who feel abandoned by God. Even D. Martin Lloyd-Jones didn't cover this topic in his classic work entitled *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*.¹

Why do you suppose this is? I think it is because we have been taught that Christians are not to experience such things, that we are only to have “life more abundantly” or to “live victoriously.” ... The dying French atheist Voltaire ... said, “I am abandoned by God and man.”

We are not surprised to hear an unbeliever say that. But if any of us should admit to such feelings, many of our friends would look askance [disapprovingly] at us, shake their heads, and wonder whether we are Christians. Isn't that true? Isn't that the chief reason why you do not talk to other Christians about this or about many other problems?”²

Aren't you glad that a spiritual giant like David did not hide his negative feelings? He did not mind being thought of as weak, failing, or troubled; he just unashamedly cried out to God for help.

This David—the psalmist, the king God chose, the man God said was after His own heart—was not embarrassed to bare his dark struggles of the soul for all to see! In fact, he wrote more psalms during his cave times than at any other period in his life (Psalms 4, 13, 40, 57, 70, 141, 142). All were lessons on how to overcome feelings of loneliness and abandonment when far from help or away from home.

If you feel unable to go on, like David did in Psalm 13, I encourage you to read through his cave-time psalms. Meditate on how he responded to God in his difficult times! If you do, you'll not only be blessed but also better understand what made David “a man after God's own heart.”

TUESDAY: Where Are You, God?

How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? (Psalm 13:1–2, emphasis added).

At the beginning of Psalm 13, David was feeling abandoned and dejected. The first two verses express the depths of his soul in four cries of anguish. Each cry is a figure of speech called *erotesis*, which is asking questions without waiting for or even expecting an answer. These cries also represent a second form of speech called *anaphora*—when the same word is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences.

David's repetitive cries pleaded with God for an answer: “*How long ...?*” He didn't even pause because he was so overcome with sorrow, grief, and a feeling of being totally alone and abandoned. By repeating himself four times, David revealed how deep this feeling ran as he cried out to God: “I just can't go on any longer!” As we consider his confessions carefully, some may strike a chord in your own heart.

My life feels like an endless struggle: *How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?* (v. 1a, emphasis added). Everyone had left David. He was hunted by his own family, his own fellow people of God, and was being threatened by his enemies. And now, on top of all that, he had

stepped into a bleak desert region. With every fiber of his being, David felt humanly dejected and abandoned. One commentator writes:

Well must David have understood what this was, when, hunted by Saul, he knew not where to betake himself, at one time seeking refuge among the Moabites, at another in the wilderness of Ziph; now an outlaw hiding himself in the cave of Adullam, and anon a captain in the service of the King of the Philistines; and amid all his projects haunted by the mournful conviction, "I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul."³

My life seems to have lost God's blessing: *How long will You **hide Your face from me***" (v. 1b, emphasis added). David was saying, "Nothing is like it used to be. Every part of my life is troubled and seems to lack Your blessing." So he cried out to God: "I don't *see You* anymore in my home, my work, or my life!" Think about how that might feel:

- **My family doesn't seem blessed anymore:** "The early joys of being a newlywed have long since faded as the reality of personality differences stress our relationship. And now, our formerly quiet, content children are growing into selfish and rebellious youths. The joy of home life has been replaced with the tension of confrontation, correction, and sorrow. Has God ceased to bless our family?"
- **My work doesn't seem blessed anymore:** "The early days of idealism, creativity, and boundless energy leading to growth and success in my career have been replaced with constant obstacles and personal stagnation. Has God ceased to bless my work?"
- **My ministry doesn't seem blessed anymore:** "The spring in my step is gone; my feet have felt like lead as I've crossed the parking lot to serve in my ministry at church! I have lost all my former joy and purpose! Has God ceased to bless my ministry?"
- **My spiritual life doesn't seem blessed anymore:** "The Word seems stale; my singing is lifeless; coming to worship is drudgery. My sins feel unforgiven, and my past is coming back to haunt me. I can't escape feeling so stained ... so distant from the Lord ... I feel like no one—not even *God*—cares about my soul! Has God ceased to bless me?"

Should any of these feelings reflect your own life, remind Jesus of His promise: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28)! Ask Him to speak His sweet peace to your heart, and then cling to Him in hope, trusting that He who cares so deeply for you will lead you safely through the difficult challenges you face. He is only a prayer away!

WEDNESDAY: Feeling Dejected and Abandoned?

*For we ... are **always delivered to death** for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh* (2 Corinthians 4:11 emphasis added).

David had dark thoughts and uncontrolled emotions. He loved the Lord, but all the stress of his terrible plight had drained him of peace and joy. As we continue to study David's Psalm 13 confessions, perhaps you can identify with how deeply wounded he felt.

My mind seems so troubled: *How long shall I take counsel in my soul, **having sorrow in my heart daily**?* (v. 2a, emphasis added). David was swept away by his emotions, which is a common experience. He couldn't calmly reflect on God's faithful hand in the past so that he could be comforted by trusting the future to Him. David had ruminated so long on disaster after disaster that he was feeding on the dark thoughts of hopelessness. So he cried out in anguish again, "God, I can't stop these feelings of dejection and abandonment!"

Usually, there are some clear causes for these feelings David confessed: emotional temperament, physical weakness, and "let down" are often at the root of discouragement. David was probably of the temperament that is more prone to discouragement. As Lloyd-Jones writes in the opening pages of his monumental book, "foremost among all causes of spiritual depression is temperament."⁴

James Boice says that "A plunge into disquieting thoughts and emotions can be caused by physical factors—illness, for example. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one of the greatest evangelical leaders of the [nineteenth] century, but he suffered from severe bouts of depression. Why? The main reason is that he suffered from gout, marked by painful inflammation of the joints and an excess of uric acid in the blood. It was common in the [nineteenth] century, and it drained Spurgeon's energies."⁵ At times of illness or extreme fatigue, we are more vulnerable to the devil or our flesh trying to push us down.

A weak time called "let down" often follows great events. For example, after Elijah's great mountaintop experience, he felt so low that he was ready to die. But God took him away to a quiet place to feed him, refresh him, and meet with him (1 Kings 18–19). It is helpful to remember that *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours ...* (James 5:17a). Even Jesus retreated from the crowds after big events like the feeding of the 5,000 and preaching campaigns because He needed extra time alone with God to refresh and renew His life. Since Elijah, Jesus, and David all needed to exercise care to protect themselves from let downs, we should not be taken by surprise when we face similar experiences in our own lives.

My life seems to have lost God's victory: *How long will my **enemy be exalted** over me?* (v. 2b, emphasis added). David soulfully concluded, "It's no use. Saul is going to win. He has all the troops, resources, and time he needs. He will end up destroying me!" So, once again, David cried out in anguish, "God, I am constantly defeated!"

Most of us probably do not have literal human enemies, at least not serious enemies. But if you are a Christian, you do have one great spiritual enemy who is worse than any human enemy imaginable. This is the devil, whom the apostle Peter compared to “a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).⁶

The devil [is] the adversary of our souls. He can use our temperaments and our physical conditions. He so deals with us that we allow our temperament to control and govern us, instead of keeping temperament where it should be kept. There is no end to the ways the devil produces spiritual depression. We must always bear him in mind.⁷

David survived his cave times by choosing to live in hope, and not the pits. In verses 3–6 of Psalm 13, he looked to the Lord, who alone could rescue him: ***Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed against him;” lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me*** (emphasis added).

David prayed, “**Look at me!**” (v. 3a). He felt that God had turned His back on him, so He asked the Lord to turn around and **consider him** by paying attention to how much he was hurting. When I am overwhelmed, my sweet wife Bonnie will come and sit down to talk with me. If I do not respond, she says, “Look at me, Honey.” She then gently puts her hand under my chin and lifts my face up to look at her eyes of love and smile of comfort. That is how God wants to encourage us as well. He says, “Look up at Me, My child!”—and when we do, His eyes of love and smile of comfort beautifully minister to our wounded spirit.

David prayed, “**Answer me!**” (v. 3b). He felt that God had stopped talking to him, and he wanted God to **hear him**. This Hebrew word for “hear” literally means “answer.” David was asking the Lord to let him hear His voice just as he did in former days. When we face times like that, we need to take God’s Word and say to Him, “Open Your Word to my heart again. Let me cling to Your truth. Help my unbelief!”

David prayed, “**Restore me!**” (v. 3c). David needed God to **enlighten him** because he believed that he was going to die, and never be king. Thus he asked God to do what He had promised. When we are discouraged, we should boldly say to the Lord, “You promised to never leave me, so I need to sense Your presence again! You told me that You loved me to the uttermost, so I need to sense Your power again! You said that You would comfort me, so I need to sense Your peace again!”

Think on this:

To be abandoned means that once you were not. For the true child of God, there is always some awareness of this truth, regardless of how deep his or her depression may be. We may be depressed even to the point of feeling utterly abandoned, but the fact that we even feel abandoned means that we really know God is there. To be aban-

doned, somebody actually needs to abandon you. Because we are Christians and have been taught by God in Scripture, we know that God still loves us and will be faithful to us, regardless of our feelings.⁸

THURSDAY: The Most Incredible Treasure of All

*“... Did not our heart burn within us while ... **He opened the Scriptures to us?**” ... And He opened their understanding, **that they might comprehend the Scriptures** (Luke 24:32, 45, emphasis added).*

The owner of the universe has given something priceless to us. First, God let Jesus reveal Himself personally to the apostle John. Then God the Father gave a gift—The Revelation of Jesus Christ—to the Son. Next, God the Son shared that gift with the apostle John, the last living apostle. Finally, John wrote it down and shared it with us. And that is the truest of treasures!

I remember a time when I thought I had a treasure. Shortly after my family moved to New England, every resident received a lottery ticket certificate in the mail. When I was growing up, swearing, smoking, chewing, drinking, and the lottery were all sins. With trepidation I therefore opened up the envelope and read: “You’re a winner!” I rushed to the nearby gas station where there were banners proclaiming a multi-million dollar jackpot. After the ticket printed out, I checked the numbers. The first matched, then the second, third, and fourth—all the way to the \$1,000,000 level. I had won the grand jackpot! The attendant was so excited that he was getting ready to call the radio, the newspaper, and the TV station, but then we looked at the bottom of the ticket. It was just a demonstration copy. That was as close as I ever got to an earthly treasure.

Even if I had actually won that jackpot, it could never compare to my delight in God’s heavenly treasure: ... *I ... count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord* ... (Philippians 3:8). Seeing the glorious majesty of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures is the most incredible treasure we could ever possess!

The apostle John’s cave time: Have you ever thought about what disturbing days John was going through when he received the Revelation? Near the end of the first century, he lived alone in a world violently hostile to Christians.

The Roman emperor was personally committed to finding Christians and erasing their influence. He had captured and killed Paul and the other apostles, and now he was hunting John, the last living apostle. Twenty-five years before John wrote out the Revelation, the emperor dipped Christians in tar. Then he tied them to posts, and lit them on fire to light his gardens at night. That is how bad the world was in John’s time!

The Roman world sent infiltrators into the church. In Acts 20:29 (KJV), Paul called them “grievous wolves” because they secretly reported what was said at the intimate church fellowship meetings. Some Christians even defected to the world, false doctrine, materialism, and immorality. The Roman government also allowed its citizens to break in and rob believers’

homes. In fact, this was so common that the writer of Hebrews spoke of Christians who “*joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] goods*” (Hebrews 10:34).

As the only surviving apostle, think of how discouraged John must have felt. For he had heard about or seen all his dearest friends savagely murdered. According to traditional church history, Peter had been crucified in Rome with his head upside down because he felt he was unworthy to die in the same manner as Christ; Andrew had been crucified at Edessa near modern Russia; James, brother of John, had been slain by Herod's sword; Matthew had been beheaded in Ethiopia; Thomas had been thrust through with a spear in India; Simon the Zealot had been crucified in Briton; Thaddeus had been crucified at Edessa near modern Russia; Bartholomew had been beaten and crucified in India; Philip had been crucified at Heliopolis in Phrygia; and James the Less had been clubbed to death in Jerusalem.

Although John was not under an immediate threat of death when he was first sent to Patmos, he knew that his turn would be coming soon. (Some records indicate that he was horribly martyred by being cast into boiling oil, but no clear account of his death has survived.) What a nightmare to be living through!

Jesus is with us always. The promise Jesus gave to His disciples at the Great Commission never changed. Jesus accompanied each of His beloved apostles as they entered the fiery furnace of troubles. He stayed beside them “*to the end*” (Matthew 28:20). When it was their “appointed” time to die, the Good Shepherd walked each disciple through the valley of death's shadow. As promised, Christ took them all home safely.

Do you also know that Jesus is with you? Are you able to trust Him to see you through—even to the end of the age?

FRIDAY: Christ's Majesty—God's Answer for Bad Times

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1, emphasis added).

Although those were very dark and disturbing days for John, they were also very dangerous times for Christ's church. This period in time was the closest, I believe, to the church ever becoming extinct.

Paul had founded the church at Ephesus, but Timothy pastored it until he was brutally martyred by a mob. After that, until he was taken prisoner by the emperor and banished to Patmos, the apostle John shepherded that great Ephesian church, which had become the largest in Asia Minor (about 5,000 saints!).

How painful it must have been for John when it appeared that His family, the church, was falling apart under the vicious attack from without, and rotting from the decay of false teaching within! Knowing that he was the last living witness of Christ—the last link to His earthly life—must have given him cause for great concern. For He was the only one left who had actually seen Jesus walk on the water, feed thousands, and raise dead corpses to life by a word!

What was God's answer for this aged, weary, distressed, saddened, frightened, and troubled servant? God made him take a long look to discover anew and afresh the most beautiful picture there is in all the Scriptures—Jesus Christ. Revelation is all about teaching us to do just that.

There is no more beautiful or more clearly painted portrait of Jesus in the whole Bible than the first chapter of Revelation. It is here that we discover Jesus revealing His glorious majesty so that we can see Him as He is (1:1–20)! If you want to discover the magnificent sovereign majesty of Jesus Christ, you need to get into the habit of looking for Him throughout the Scriptures. Make that your heart's desire, for He can be seen all the way through the Bible.

One night, I came into the church building where my wife was attending a ladies' salad supper. I needed to talk with her for a moment. Scores of women were milling around, so I just stood there in the doorway looking across the room. I kept looking until I saw my Bonnie, and my eyes locked on her. Later, someone said to her, "That was so sweet! I saw the look on your husband's face when he finally saw you." And that is the kind of look you should have in your heart when you read the Scriptures. You should not be content until you see Jesus every time you get into His Word. Every time!

If you are going through disturbing, dangerous, despairing days in your life, *look for Christ*. His purpose is not that we should primarily fear Him, but that we should *trust* Him. For **Christ is in control**. That is why we believe that His church will not be subjected to all the turmoil and death of the Great Tribulation: *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Hope for the end of days: Revelation is a book that offers a hope that is the answer to all fears: thinking the world is "going down the drain"; economic instability and future economic upheavals; friends turning their backs on Christ; potential terrorist acts and global plagues; and any other trouble, trial, or upset we may face.

Are all the closest people in your life dying, getting weak, or going through terrible times of physical, emotional, or spiritual oppression like the apostle John experienced? Instead of weakening in those times, that is a call of God for you to take a careful look at Jesus. Ask Him to allow you to see Jesus like never before (Psalm 119:18).

Are you trusting Jesus? As the hoofbeats of the horsemen of the end are heard louder each day, I pray that your heart will rest in the One who holds you securely!

SATURDAY: Find Hope in Christ's Reign of Majesty

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last" (Revelation 1:17, emphasis added).

Chapter after chapter of Revelation, God's final book, is one of the amazing discoveries about the Christ who is beyond the capacity of human minds to fully comprehend! The first chapter alone far exceeds any ideas we may have previously formed of this One we call Jesus. For it is

here that we discover Christ revealing His glorious majesty so that the scales fall off our eyes, and we are able to see Him as He truly is: *“the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End,”* the One *“who is and who was and who is to come”*—the almighty God (1:8)!

In chapters 2:1–3:22, we see Christ’s glorious majesty challenging His church universal through special messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor. And the Lord says, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). His admonitions to each church also have a direct application to our generation as we face the soon return of Christ.

In chapters 4:1–16:21, we learn that Christ’s majesty is controlling His cosmos. Suddenly John is caught up into heaven where he sees a vision of God Almighty on His throne being worshiped by all of Christ’s followers and the heavenly angels (4:1–11). But then John sees God give a scroll with seven seals to the worthy Lamb, Jesus (5:1–14). As the Lamb begins to open the seals one by one, a new vision appears, and God’s wrath and judgment associated with each seal is unleashed upon the earth’s inhabitants (6:1–16:21).

In Revelation 17:1–20:15, we see Christ’s majesty conquering the rebellion on earth. During this period He unmask the apostasy and reveals His own saints.

In Revelation 21:1–22:5, Christ’s majesty unveils His paradise. As we discover the husbandly love of Jesus and the wonders of what He has prepared for His bride, the church, we can find hope in all His plans and adore Him as our future husband!

In Revelation 22:6–21, Christ’s majesty is again seen in the extravagance of His salvation offer to all who come to Him: *Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (22:17).

But Christ also gives this ominous warning to those who read Revelation: *... 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 ... this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things ... written in this book* (22:18–19).

In light of all these wonders of Christ’s majesty, may you be able to genuinely pray, like John: *Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus* (22:20).

Make a choice to live in hope. Worship Jesus in the splendor of His redeeming love, His perfect patience, His perfect holiness, His perfect redemption, His perfect justice, and His perfect wrath!

Ask God to open your eyes to see Jesus in all His glorious majesty! Adore Him for who He really is, *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen* (Romans 11:36).

Like David, cry out, *I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together* (Psalm 34:1–3).

May the words of this wonderful song become the deep prayer of your heart:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, Now to His temple draw near;
Praise Him in glad adoration.*

*Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth.
Shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen How thy desires e'er have been
Granted in what He ordaineth?*

*Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee.
Ponder anew What the Almighty can do,
If with His love He befriend thee.*

*Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him.
Let the Amen Sound from His people again,
Gladly for aye we adore Him.*

**—German Hymn, Joachim Neander 1650-1680
Tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878, alt.**

Week 8—Look Into Christ's Eyes

(Revelation 1:14)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you
look into the amazing eyes of Jesus Christ!



SUNDAY: The Amazing Eyes of Jesus Christ

*His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and **His eyes like a flame of fire** (Revelation 1:14, emphasis added).*

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to personally look into the eyes of Jesus Christ? When most people think of Jesus, they immediately picture His eyes of compassion—perhaps as the Good Shepherd carrying a lamb, or of Jesus tenderly cradling a little child on His lap. There's no doubt about it: Jesus cares deeply about His children!

Consider these different ways that the eyes of the Lord so lovingly watched out for His children: Hagar experienced Christ's **eyes of compassion** (Genesis 16:1–13); Joseph experienced Christ's purifying **eyes of consecration** (Genesis 39:1–9); David experienced Christ's ever-present **eyes of comfort** and confidence when he felt alone and fearful (Psalm 139); the disciples experienced Christ's calming **eyes of rescue** (Matthew 14:22–33); and Peter experienced Christ's sad **eyes of chastening** when he tried to live in his own strength (Luke 22:54–62).

When we are troubled, Jesus says, "Look up! See My eyes of compassion and concern for you." He longs for His children to keep on looking into His eyes so that He can guide and care for us.

All of us, adults and children alike, are easily drawn to Christ's eyes of compassion, but we should never forget that He also has **eyes of fiery judgment**. When Jesus stood before the apostle John, John was so afraid that he "*fell at His feet as dead*" (Revelation 1:17). What he saw revealed that the eyes of Jesus were ablaze with an otherworldly glow, a fire that nothing can stand before. For just a moment, consider what it means to have laser-like eyes:

A laser is a beam of coherent or focused light. Sunlight is incoherent and unfocused light of many wavelengths, and going in every direction. A laser is light of one wavelength and direction. Thus a laser can focus the energy of light to a point bright enough to melt and vaporize steel, rock, or any other material we know of on earth. A laser works a million times faster and more powerfully than a nuclear explosion. A concentrated point of light all going in one direction and at the same wavelength can heat material at a rate of *one trillion degrees per second*.¹ (Emphasis added.)

Applying that knowledge to the eyes of Jesus, imagine what it would be like to personally look into His eyes—*the amazing eyes of God!*

The eyes of Jesus inspect and refine our lives. He can see right through us. He can see people in the dark, far away, and even in the future. Jesus sees into the very core of our being as His “*eyes like a flame of fire*” penetratingly scrutinize us. He “*... is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets ...*” (Daniel 2:47). Do you remember the comment of the woman at the well who fell under Jesus’ gaze? He told her the secrets of her past, things that she thought were long forgotten: *The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet ...”* (John 4:19a). Incredibly, God Almighty *knows the secrets of the heart* (Psalm 44:21b)!

Christ always sees us and wants to help. Pastor Kent Hughes reports that the College Church of Wheaton has observed:

For the Christian, the most chilling fact is this: there is little statistical difference between the ethical practices of the religious and the non-religious. Sadly, Christians are almost as likely as non-Christians to: Surf through polluted waters on the internet, Misreport their income on tax returns, Commit acts of plagiarism (teachers especially witness this), Ignore proper building permits and say “but that’s the way business is done,” Use an illegal copy of a computer program, Steal time from their jobs, Use the company phone for personal toll-calls, Oversell a product to the point of untruthfulness, Tell people just what they want to hear, or Be selective in obeying various laws.²

With that in mind, since Jesus continually looks through you with His laser-like eyes, ask yourself: *Do I like what He sees? Does Jesus like what He sees?* While in your sin, you need to look up and see the sad eyes of Jesus. But when you do, remember that He always offers forgiveness and a way out that leads to victory. Through Christ’s power, you *can* please the Lord with what He sees in you!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, through Your Spirit, open our hearts to Your Son: that we, through Your Word, might behold the wonder of the eyes of Jesus; that we are never out of sight; that we are never far from His compassionate, comforting, and convicting gaze. I pray that we would know the wonder of ever-being before Your eyes,*

oh God, with whom we have to do. May the reality that we live every moment in the sight of God impact us in a positive way that will direct our hearts to make choices to choose to please You with what You see. We thank You, for in Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

MONDAY: The Watchful Eyes of Jesus

“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12, emphasis added).

We can experience the amazing, watchful eyes of Jesus wherever we are in life! Here are some more instances where the eyes of our Lord Jesus had a very powerful ministry to those who acknowledged that He was looking at them:

- As the Creator, Jesus walked through the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. God the Son created the universe: *For by Him all things were created All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist* (Colossians 1:16–17).
- Jesus said, “... *Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it and was glad*” (John 8:56). The Old Testament doesn't say that Abraham actually saw Jesus; he saw the Lord. But the only Lord we see is God the Son, Jesus Christ, who came and manifested Himself throughout the Old Testament.
- When Hagar saw the Angel of the Lord—that was Jesus! (Genesis 16:6–9)
- When the children of Israel went through the Red Sea, Jesus Christ was leading them. Even though the Old Testament says that the Angel of the Lord led them, from the New Testament we know that this was Jesus Christ. (Compare 1 Corinthians 10 with Exodus 14, 16–17.)

As Jesus stands in the midst of the church, His laser-like eyes look with a penetrating gaze into the core of your being. Those eyes are like a refining fire, and “the God who sees you” wants to help you, just as He did the saints in Bible times. You are never out of His sight—never far from His compassionate, comforting, and convicting gaze.

May the reality that you live every moment in His sight impact you in a positive way that will direct your heart to make choices to please Him!

TUESDAY: The Compassionate Eyes of Jesus

*Then [Hagar] called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, **You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees**; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” (Genesis 16:13, emphasis added).*

In the verse above, we see the compassionate eyes of Christ on a downcast, forsaken, homeless woman with child who had fled to the desert. What happened that caused Hagar to flee? Let’s look at God’s Genesis 16 account of her plight and find out.

Sarai suffered decades of shame by having no children. Even after God’s promise to Abraham, they still had no child; so she took matters into her own hands. Although it was important to have an heir, Sarai calculatingly took it upon herself to try to work out God’s will for Him. She thus said to Abram, ... *“See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. ... So he went in to Hagar and she conceived (Genesis 16:2, 4).*

When Hagar discovered that she was going to have Abram’s child, she thought she would now be his favored wife. Hence, a rivalry developed between her and Sarai. To keep peace, Abram gave Sarai permission to do with Hagar as she pleased. After being treated harshly by Sarai, Hagar ran away (Genesis 16:5–6).

The Angel of the LORD (Jesus) found her by a spring of water in the wilderness and said, *“Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.” The Angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand” (Genesis 16:7–9).*

In spite of Hagar’s difficulties, Jesus told her, “Return, even if Sarai despises you and treats you wrongly.” In other words, He is telling us that we should not run from our problems—He wants to give us His grace to go *through* them victoriously.

Jesus then said to her, *“I will multiply your descendants exceedingly Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction” (Genesis 16:10–11).*

It is interesting that this is very similar to the announcement in Matthew: *“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel ...” (Matthew 1:23).* This is the Lord foretelling someone’s name and his or her destiny.

But Ishmael had quite a different destiny than Christ: *“He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man’s hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, **You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees**; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” (Genesis 16:12–13, emphasis added).*

Since God paid attention to someone like Hagar, how much more will He diligently pay attention to those who bear the name of Christ? Hagar did not choose Abraham as her husband; she did not want trouble. She was only trying to be a mother and a wife. God understood Hagar’s

dilemma: right from the beginning, she did not have a choice in Sarai's plan; Hagar was a servant who should never have been purchased in Egypt in the first place. He therefore understands when you are thrust into situations that you did not plan on either. No matter how difficult your life may be, Jesus' compassionate eyes see you in your troubles, and He is waiting for you to look up to Him for help!

WEDNESDAY: The Purifying Eyes of Jesus

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and **see if there is any wicked way in me**, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23–24, emphasis added).*

When we are tempted, we need to discover Christ's purifying eyes. He looks at us in our temptation much like a parent looks at a child. Jesus foresees what choice we are going to make, and wants us to seek His help to avoid sinking into that temptation. At such times, He will give us the needed consecration and purity.

Let's consider how God helped Joseph in this respect as we examine portions of the account of his life in Genesis 37–50. Joseph is a wonderful example that true success comes from the Lord being with us: *The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man ...* (Genesis 39:2a). Every other success is merely temporal.

I once read in the *Jerusalem Post* that many Jewish people think that because Bill Gates is so wealthy, he is the most amazing man in the world. You see, they equate success with wealth. Yet, with all his billions, Bill Gates can have no greater happiness or joy in life (less in fact) than a believer who has Jesus Christ and no money. Do you understand that to be true? Jesus is the only One who can possibly bring true success.

If the Lord is seen in your work, like Joseph, you should be blessed in everything that you do: ... *The LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand* (Genesis 39:3). As you give your life totally to the Lord, He will make you prosperous also. Although I am talking here about evident blessing, and not monetary prosperity, sometimes God grants that as well.

God will even bless those for whom you work if they honor your convictions: ... *From the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, ... **the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake** ...* (Genesis 39:4–5, emphasis added).

I remember telling a former employer that I would not do certain things because it would be dishonest to do so. That company released me from those requirements, but the rest of the sales people followed them. I honored God, and my sales went up. This testifies to the fact that God will honor honesty and bless your employer as well.

If you put a Christian and a non-Christian on an equal playing field, the Christian should always do better in everything because the God of the universe indwells him or her. We have hope, joy, and peace; we live in reality, but the people of the world do not.

Here is a classic case of the purifying eyes of Jesus when we are tempted: ... *Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came to pass ... that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master ... has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"* (Genesis 39:6–9).

Joseph was always aware of Jesus' eyes upon him—His purifying eyes that lead to consecration. Jesus continually sees our business, social, romantic, private, and public lives. If we, like Joseph, acknowledge that He is watching us, there will be a very strong consecrating effect on us as well.

I can personally testify of being aware that Jesus is watching works anywhere. The first time I traveled overseas I was all alone, thousands of miles from home, with every conceivable temptation confronting me. Whether it was literature, people, or things, I was so aware that God was watching that I would sometimes even talk out loud and say, "Lord, help me." It is always possible for you to know the purifying power of seeing the eyes of Jesus watching you everywhere, every time.

Jesus can keep you pure in temptation. Joseph was kept pure when he faced being disloyal to his employer and sinning against God. He could not have had a more direct attack on his personal holiness than this, so he exercised his will and ran. Keeping pure involves far more than standing in the midst of temptation and saying, "Lord, save me." God has not promised to remove you bodily from temptation. Rather, He expects you to choose to flee evil (2 Timothy 2:22). So turn off the television, throw away the literature, or stop being around that person who drags you down spiritually.

At the instant of any temptation, Jesus' purifying eyes are watching you so that all you have to do is look up and say, "Lord, help me!" If you just ask Him, He will give you the grace to resist: ... *God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but ... will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

THURSDAY: The Comforting Eyes of Jesus

... *The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him* (2 Chronicles 16:9, emphasis added).

David certainly experienced *the eyes of the Lord* that continually watched over him! His life tells us much about the ever-present comforting eyes of the Lord when we feel alone and afraid. It seems that everywhere David turned there was trouble. His brothers did not like him; his father, Jesse, did not think much of him either. When the prophet Samuel came and asked to see his sons, his father did not even consider David to be one of them—he had left David out in the field with the sheep!

After God anointed David, he still had to take care of the animals; he was not honored at all. When he became king, he continued to have a multitude of problems; enemies everywhere were trying to kill him. Trouble was around every bend in his life. In light of all David's imperfections, failures, and blatant sins, why did God call him "*a man after My own heart*" (Acts 13:22)? We find the secret in Psalm 139. David lived in constant awareness that God was watching him.

Look at the eyes of Jesus that were on David: *O LORD, **You have searched me and known me.** ... You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. ... You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me* (Psalm 139:1–5, emphasis added).

Do you understand what that passage means? God says that He is right there with you, and that He surrounds you! He already knows about all the days of your life: ***Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. and in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them*** (Psalm 139:16, emphasis added). What a comfort!

That is why God says in Hebrews 9:27 that it is *appointed* unto us once to die. Because of that, we can rest in the fact that we will not die accidentally or before our time! Why? Unless the Rapture occurs first, we each have a God-appointed time for Jesus to meet us and take us home. That is both a wonder and a comfort!

You can find confidence in Christ. In Psalm 139:23–24, David asked the Lord to show him why he felt anxious. Basically, this is what he said: "What do I fear that You have told me not to fear? What am I focusing on that I should not be? Turn me from any wicked way, Lord, and help me to follow Your way alone!"

Since God knows how we are made, He knows both our changeable and unchangeable features. He is thus never caught off guard by our weaknesses, anxieties, and fears. As we open up to Him, like David, we will realize that God sees us, and that He will help us walk confidently in the everlasting way. The Bible says, *The wicked flee when no one pursues but the righteous are bold as a lion* (Proverbs 28:1). God wants us to be boldly confident, and not fearful. He is watching over us to give comfort and confidence, and He knows every step of our way!

FRIDAY: The Calming Eyes of Jesus

*... **He saw them** straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea ...* (Mark 6:48, emphasis added).

The disciples saw the calm rescuing eyes of Jesus when they were sinking in the storm. The account in Matthew 14:22–33 is one of the most precious and insightful portions of God's Word, dealing with His tender love and care for us as His children. As I was writing this, a group of us were reflecting on these truths while taking a devotional walk through the land of the Book. The image of this scene from high atop the Arbel Cliffs is still etched upon my soul!

- **Jesus made His disciples get into the boat.** When their lives were in danger, it was out of obedience to Him. If they had not obeyed Jesus, they would not have learned what He wanted to teach them. The Lesson: **Obey Jesus!**
- **Jesus left them all night.** He waited until 3:00 A.M.—when the disciples were at the extremity of their trial. Remember Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? Jesus did not hurry to them. He let Lazarus get sicker and sicker and actually die (John 11). Jesus does not run to us to prevent the trial. In this instance, His purpose was to demonstrate to His disciples, in an unforgettable way, that He would do whatever was necessary to rescue them. He wants to do the same for us as well. The Lesson: **Trust Jesus!**
- **Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.** Jesus' pathway was the very object that was testing their faith. He knew exactly where they were the whole time. They were never out of His sight. They might have forgotten all His promises, but Jesus did not forget. We will never find ourselves anywhere the Lord cannot find us. That is comforting! There are no storms in life that Jesus cannot subdue *in His time*. There is never a valid reason to fear, nor to be anxious. We are to trust in the One who will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5b). So through the storm, on the pathway, and in whatever it is that is giving you a hard time, know that He is coming to your aid. The Lesson: **Keep looking for Jesus!**
- **Jesus brought calm in their boat.** When we are obedient to the Lord, we are in the safest place in the universe. No matter how frightening the circumstances may be around us, Jesus is there; He will calm the seas of trouble *in His time*. The most secure place to be is in God's will. Peter sank because he did not understand that the lesson was to love the Lord Jesus enough to trust Him. Peter did love Him: did anyone else say, "Command me to come to You on the water; I will obey whatever You say; Your Word is my command!"? We should not think badly of Peter for sinking; we should love Jesus as he did, and do whatever He says. The Lesson: **Love Jesus!**

When you invite Jesus into the boat of your stormy life, your life will become calm. (Anything that is "out of control" has not been fully surrendered to God.) Even though you may be tossed all about, if the Lord is in your boat, all is well!

SATURDAY: The Chastening Eyes of Jesus

... The Lord ... looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Luke 22:61, emphasis added).

In Luke 22:54–62, God gives us the account of when Peter saw the sad and chastening eyes of Jesus because he was living in his own strength. Peter first *walked* with the sinners, then he *stood* with them, and finally he *sat* with them around the fire. It was a progression—the more Peter sat with those who were a part of Jesus' condemnation, the farther away he was getting from Christ. God tells us: *Blessed is the man who **walks not** in the counsel of the ungodly, **nor stands** in the path of sinners, **nor sits** in the seat of the scornful ...* (Psalm 1:1, emphasis added).

That is one of the reasons why Peter fell into this situation that the Lord had warned him about: *But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And **the Lord** turned and **looked at Peter**. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord So Peter went out and wept bitterly* (Luke 22:60–62, emphasis added).

Sometimes the eyes of Jesus are not just the eyes that are giving compassion, comfort, and confidence; they must also be chastening eyes. With His chastening eyes, He looks at us when we give in to our sins.

The laser-like eyes of Jesus are continually inspecting and refining our lives. If we give in to temptations, we will receive the chastening look of sadness as Jesus looks on us and says, "Oh, My child, I *warned* you to not do that!"

Make a choice to live in hope. Sometimes you will need to look up in your sin and see those grieved eyes of Jesus. When you do, remember that He always offers a way out; He always offers a way through; and He always offers you victory. I exhort you to choose His victory today by making the following promise to Him:

- **When troubled**—I will look up for Jesus' loving eyes of compassion. I will remember Hagar's experience of His compassionate eyes! (Genesis 16:1–13)
- **When tempted**—I will look up for Jesus' purifying eyes of consecration. I will remember Joseph's experience of His purifying eyes when tempted! (Genesis 39:1–9)
- **When watched**—I will look up for Jesus' refining eyes like laser beams. I will remember the Israelites' experience of His refining eyes as He led them through the Red Sea and in the wilderness! (Exodus 14, 16–17)
- **When lonely or afraid**—I will look up for Jesus' comforting eyes of confidence. I will remember David's experience of His ever-present eyes of comfort when feeling alone and afraid! (Psalm 139)
- **When scrutinized**—I will look up for Jesus' caring eyes of concern. I will remember the woman at the well and her experience of Jesus' caring eyes as He revealed the secrets of her past! (John 4:1–26)

- **When sinking in despair**—I will look up for Jesus' calming eyes of rescue. I will remember the disciples' experience of His calm rescuing eyes when sinking! (Matthew 14:22–33)
- **When sinning**—I will look up for Jesus' chastening eyes of sadness and come back to Him. I will remember Peter's experience and Christ's sad eyes of chastening when living in my own strength! (Luke 22:54–62)

I encourage you to make a choice even today to live in hope by experiencing the eyes of Christ—*the amazing eyes of God!* If Jesus has touched your heart in a special way this week, you can affirm your promise to Him by offering a prayer of renewed dedication of your love for Him!

Week 9—Listen to Christ's Voice

(Revelation 1:15)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you listen to the awesome voice of Christ!



SUNDAY: Listen to Your Creator

His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters (Revelation 1:15, emphasis added).

Have you heard the almighty and powerful voice of Jesus? He is speaking every day! As the Creator, Jesus' voice resounds throughout planet Earth! Have you heard Jesus' voice speaking in nature?

The apostle John writes that His voice is *as the sound of many waters* (Revelation 1:15b). In that verse, John used the metaphor of a thunderous waterfall. Have you ever stood at the crest of the impressive Niagara Falls? My family and I have, and it is an incredible combination of sight and sound as the avalanche of rushing water vibrates the ground as it thunders downward and then bursts upward in mist. It is magnificent to behold!

Since most of us do not live by a mighty waterfall, Psalm 29 uses another metaphor for the voice of the Lord—the deep rumble and loud roar of thunder. I, therefore, happen to like Oklahoma's severe thunderstorms that make our windows shake and rattle! Why? They always focus my thoughts on Psalm 29. Jesus wants us to *listen* for His voice in the storms. So the next time you experience a bad thunderstorm, instead of worrying about it, worship Him through it!

All Creation declares God's glory! As you listen for His voice in the storms, ponder these interesting scientific facts about thunder and lightning:

Thunder is merely a byproduct of lightning which is a river of electricity careening at 100,000 miles per second, down a twisting canyon of air. About 400 people per year

are killed by lightning, [normally] more than any other natural disaster. Yet, without lightning, life as we know it could not exist.

Air molecules are heated to about the temperature of the Sun's surface by that electricity. They are white hot at 30,000 degrees Celsius when the bolt of lightning passes through them. Around the planet 100 times each second, lightning strikes the earth with its intense, hot strokes. In a very real sense, it is feeding the plants as the nitrous oxide distills in the rains and goes to the roots of plants. Almost all plants need nitrogen as their basic food. Although 22 million tons of nitrogen hangs in the air over every square mile of the planet, it is unusable without the effects of lightning.

Lightning that we see is actually traveling upward. It is the meeting of a "leader" coming down from the negatively charged base of a thundercloud, meeting a "streamer" coming up from the positively charged earth beneath that cloud. In the one second long duration of the lightning, as many as 40 pulses of energy have occurred. Heat rising so rapidly out of this super hot path breaks the sound barrier and "thunder" is produced.¹ Each stroke contains hundreds of thousands of amperes, and hundreds of millions of volts. All told a single storm produces more electricity than all of America's generators combined.² A single stroke lasting one second could power a city.³ And with over 600 storms at any given moment on the earth, God's power dwarfs all of man's efforts!

The sound of the Lord as He shakes the earth is a call to reverence Him. God uses thunder and lightning for many things. For example, He used it in the seventh plague against the Egyptians: ... *The LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground ...* (Exodus 9:23). Another wonderful example is when Samuel cried out to God in behalf of Israel, and the Lord answered him in a miraculous way: ... *The LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel* (1 Samuel 7:10).

Those two examples alone are enough to cause us to be awed by the Lord God Almighty's powerful and thunderous voice! Will you listen to God's voice today as He speaks to you through His Word?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, I pray that we would each hear the voice of Jesus, that we would respond to His voice, and that we might live ever-mindful that You wish to commune with us. Ever since the first time You spoke to Your creatures in the Garden of Eden, to the moment when we enter glory and forever shall be with You, how we long to hear and respond to Your voice! We love You, and ask that You would open our hearts, illumine our minds, quicken our spirits, motivate our wills, and engage us to be Your pleasing servants through exposure to Your Word. We pray that Christ will get all the glory, and that we be purified that we may offer exceedingly precious and fragrant worship to You. In the blessed name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Listen to Your Redeemer

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia ..." (Revelation 1:10-11a, emphasis added).

God created us to hear the voice of Jesus. So it is not strange that, when the Creator met with John on Patmos, John heard His voice. As we listen to those words captured by John, every one of these facets of Christ's beauty calls us to the same response: worship.

Can you imagine how John felt when he first heard the voice like a trumpet? Or what it might have been like for him to see Jesus in the beauty of His deity, and the wonder of who He is? To then be chosen to write down what he saw, and what was yet to come, must have been awe-inspiring to this lonely exile!

In Revelation 1–3, Jesus' voice is calling the church throughout the ages to worship Him! In Revelation 1, there are nine reasons why we must listen to and worship our divine Redeemer:

1. **Jesus is the Conqueror of Adam's fallen race**—One like the Son of Man, robed to His feet. (1:13)
2. **Jesus is the Perfect Priest**—with hair as white as snow. (1:14a)
3. **Jesus is the Ancient of Days**—with eyes like a flame of fire. (1:14b)
4. **Jesus is the Seer of All Secrets**—with feet like fine brass. (1:15a)
5. **Jesus is the Ultimate Judge**—crushing all foes with a voice as thunderous as the twelve million cubic feet of water crashing at Niagara's base! (1:15b)
6. **Jesus is the Voice of God**—commanding all to pay attention. (1:15b) Even the deaf and the dead can hear it, and so should we!
7. **Jesus is the Possessor of All Secrets of the Universe**—holding the stars in His hand, which He spoke into existence by His Word. (1:16a)
8. **Jesus is the Creator of All Things**—with the face of incomprehensible countenance, blazing with the power of the sun. (1:16b)
9. **Jesus is the All-Powerful Lord of Glory**—who says to us, "Will you worship Me?" (1:17–18)

As you reflect upon the nine signs of Christ's divinity listed above, listen for Jesus' voice—and worship Him! One way to worship the Lord is to dwell on the truth that Jesus came and rescued you. Another is to meditate upon how thankful you are that He is your perfect priest. Or you can praise Him for being the eternal One you can trust! Another example of fragrant worship is to express adoration that His all-seeing eyes always know where you are and what you need! On and on the list can go. Now take a moment and offer thanksgiving for all the other things He brings to mind!

TUESDAY: The Voice of Jesus in Eden

... *The LORD **God called to Adam** and said to him, "Where are you?"* (Genesis 3:9, emphasis added).

The final book of God's Word is The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Within the chapters of that book are reflections from every part of the Scriptures. It is amazing that each element of God's revelation starts in Genesis and finds completion in Revelation. In other words, answers to the age-old questions that began in the book of Genesis are found in Revelation.

Let's go back and meet the first two humans on earth. Listen to the inspired, accurate, and divine recounting of their experience of hearing the voice of Jesus in the Garden of Eden.

Think with me of life as a perfect human. Picture yourself at the dawn of creation as Adam or Eve, perfect and sinless. Your first memory is that of waking up in God's garden, Eden. You live in a comfortable world with no extremes of hot and cold, no storms, no disasters to fear. Your home is secure; there are no pestering bugs, poisonous snakes, or deadly spiders. There is just the continual beauty of fragrant and color-filled flowering orchids hanging from the verdant green trees and blooms that never fall off, never yellow, or wilt. Full, juicy fruit hang ripe on the branches, but never fall off and rot.

Even more, you have a body that never aches, a digestive system that never rebels, eyesight that needs no correction, and ears that hear the sweet sounds of life all around. No pains; never a sorrow; no weariness; not even a fear—just peace-filled living.

God's perfect garden is a paradise. Every day is an adventure of new colors, new fragrances, and new symmetry in flowers, butterflies, and all the wonders of a perfect animal world. There are no predators, no scavengers, and no carnivores. Only placid and magnificent creatures reflecting the majesty of God live in the garden. And around every corner of towering and graceful trees, each perfectly planted by God, are flocks, herds, and gatherings of exquisite living animals that God has created and brought to life.

But the best of everything is the sweet sound of the voice of your Creator, God the Son, Jesus Christ. About supertime each day a gentle breeze whispers by, and then you hear His voice. The gardener and planner of the universe soon walks with you in the cool of the day. He seeks fellowship with you, His best friend, whom He has made to look just like Him. And your ears hear the sweetest sound of all—the voice of Jesus who created you!

But soon your paradise will be lost ... The “bad guy” has entered into God’s perfect garden, and nothing will ever be the same again!

WEDNESDAY: Satan Hates the Voice of God

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him (Matthew 4:10-11, emphasis added).

The “bad guy” in paradise—that old serpent, Satan—planned a masterful scheme for mankind! More than anything, he has wanted to make us doubt, reject, and become deafened to the voice of God! And had you and I been in the Garden of Eden instead of Adam and Eve, we would have made the same fatal choice. Instead of listening to God, they listened to Satan, who took God’s Word and twisted it. Satan must have thought that he’d scored a final coup with his plan to cut off the voice of Jesus from His children:

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).

Satan’s Four Spiritual Flaws: Satan’s plan, even to this day, involves four elements from Genesis 3 that are the main threads that weave together through all the false religions of the world. All false religions are derived from these lies of Satan that seek to keep mankind from listening to the voice of their Creator. We will cover three of them now, and then go over the fourth in tomorrow’s devotional.

1. **Doubt God’s Word:** When young people are first exposed to secular scientific theories (with the God of Scripture left out), Satan always plants this seed of doubt in their minds: *“Has God indeed said ...?”* (3:1b). Since listening to the voice of Jesus always involves the Bible, Satan tries to persuade us that God’s Word is just like any other book. “Oh,” he says, “the Bible is nice, perhaps helpful, but it is not absolute.” His ultimate plan is to keep us from regular contact with the Lord by questioning, avoiding, or neglecting the Word. The Lesson: **You doubt God when you doubt His Word.**
2. **Doubt God’s goodness:** Satan planted seeds of doubt in Eve when he said, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (3:1b). He wanted her to doubt God and

His goodness. He likewise bombards each of us by whispering lies such as: *God is trying to hold out on you ... He is robbing you of some good times ... He is out of touch with your needs ... He missed that disaster you just went through ... He messed up on how He made you ... God means well, but since He doesn't quite have everything under control, that makes Him not good.*

Satan's fiery darts of lies are reserved for our most vulnerable moments. For instance, when a baby is born who is not fully functioning, or a young person's life is cut off in what seems to be a tragic and untimely death, a normal reaction is to cry out, "Why, Lord?" Things like this simply make no sense to our finite minds, so we may be tempted to doubt God's goodness.

Another example is when teens idolize those who grace magazine covers or are otherwise in the social spotlight. At some point, however, they have to come to grips with the fact that they will never look like those people. So they may begin to despise their own features and question God's goodness by thinking: *Why did God make me this way?*

When the storms of life are at their fiercest, don't give in to thoughts like this that challenge your faith: *Is God really in control? Why is He letting this happen to me? Where is He? Is He really good?* At such times, watch out because Satan acts like a prowling lion (1 Peter 5:8), and you must not give the devil a place to land in your life (Ephesians 4:27). In Ephesians 4:25–31, Paul lists sins that can open you up to Satan's influence in ways that will hinder your walk in Christ. Satan lurks at the door of your mind, so do not let him in! The Lesson: **You doubt God when you doubt God's goodness.**

3. **Doubt God's authority:** In Satan's next all-out attack to deceive Eve, he says point blank: *"You will not surely die"* (3:4). Satan loves it when we doubt God! He wants us to believe that God is not in charge, that God is not interested in our choices, and that God will not hold us accountable for our deeds. When that happens, every man or woman does whatever seems right in his or her own eyes. That is the hallmark of our world—take charge of your own life, and be all you can or want to be! The Lesson: **You doubt God when you doubt God's authority.**

Never forget that Satan's masterful scheme is to make you doubt, reject, and become deafened to the voice of Jesus. Because you are not listening to the voice of Jesus when you think wrongly about God, daily ask yourself: *Whose voice am I listening to?*

THURSDAY: Satan Wants to Silence God's Voice

"The thief [Satan] does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy ..."
(John 10:10, emphasis added).

Yesterday we learned that Satan has four spiritual flaws that he uses to try to silence God's voice in our lives. We have discussed the first three in which Satan tempts us to doubt God's Word, doubt God's goodness, and doubt God's authority. Here is his fourth spiritual flaw:

4. **Doubt God's plan:** In Genesis 3:5 Satan blocked the Creator's voice when he said "... *Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" From the very beginning, Satan has sought to convince mankind that his way is better than God's. Thus he tries to entice us with his own plan for how we can achieve immortality, glory, and happiness. How does Satan do that? He tries to solidly plant this thought in our minds: *Abandon all those restraints—just let go and work out your own plan for pleasure!* The Lesson: **You doubt God when you doubt His plan for you.**

Satan loves it when he gets us to doubt God and His plan! The devil's scheme is to plant thoughts that God's way is too restrictive, but his way allows freedom to pursue whatever lusts will bring the greatest pleasure. In fact, if Satan were to summarize his plan for us as a billboard ad, it would probably read:

**Go for the gusto!
You only go around once!
Get your gratification now.**

Satan delights in whispering to us: *Lust won't wait, so lust for what you want—and take it every chance you get!* That is exactly what Adam and Eve did when they gave in to their desire for pleasure (Genesis 3:6). Thus the horrible precipitous slide down into sin began, as these verses reveal: *Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden ..., and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God ...* (Genesis 3:7–8, emphasis added).

Before this awful day, Adam and Eve had been drawn to the voice of the Lord, and responded to Him. They both had longed to talk with their Creator and tell Him of their discoveries. They loved to ask Him questions about His universe and the garden they lived in. But now they discovered that His voice repelled them, so they hid among the trees of the garden. Then God—this Jesus who came "*to seek and to save that which was lost*"—had to become the seeking One (Luke 19:10).

The Creator Himself is the One who seeks out His fallen creatures: *Then the LORD God called to Adam ..., "Where are you?"* (Genesis 3:9). When the Lord confronted Adam concerning his sin, he abdicated his leadership role and blamed it on his wife, saying: *"The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate"* (Genesis 3:12). Eve then blamed her sin on the serpent: *"The serpent deceived me, and I ate"* (Genesis 3:13).

Satan inhabited the serpent, which was upright, and the most beautiful of all the created animals as it glistened with all the lovely colors. But Satan's use of the serpent brought God's curse to crawl in the dust and become a sign of evil: *"Because you have done this,"* God said to the

serpent, “*You are cursed ...; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. 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 3:14–15, emphasis added).

Every time a new child is conceived in this world, he or she, as a descendant of Adam, is already a sinner because of divine decree. But as soon as the child is old enough to make conscious choices, proof of being a sinner is soon evident through wrong actions.

As for the term “her Seed,” women don’t have seed. This is a very strange idea until you understand the virgin birth of Christ—that the virgin Mary would bear a child without the seed of a man (Isaiah 7:14). The Seed of the woman is Jesus Christ. Jesus’ body was buffeted and broken because of sin. But on the cross, He crushed the head of Satan ... *that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ...* (Hebrews 2:14b).

Because Satan is not omniscient (all-knowing), he thought that he was scoring a major coup in the Garden of Eden! But God was actually in control—as always—working out His masterful plan for the ages so that you and I can have enduring hope for the future!

FRIDAY: Listen to Jesus’ Voice in His Word

*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was **confirmed** to us **by those who heard Him** ...?* (Hebrews 2:3, emphasis added).

For every one of Satan’s spiritual flaws, God counters with a positive and powerful law. Therefore, He has *four spiritual laws* that destroy Satan’s *four spiritual flaws*.

God’s Four Spiritual Laws:

1. **Trust God’s Word:** *Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven* (Psalm 119:89). God’s Word has never been proven to be in error scientifically, morally, or historically. God’s Word is the only thing that you can stake your life on!
2. **Rest in God’s goodness:** *Truly God is good ... to such as are pure in heart* (Psalm 73:1). God is indeed good, and He has revealed Himself to be so. He always makes good decisions! He made you well; you are a beautiful work of art, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10). He made you for His glory, so never wonder why He has allowed something to happen in your life; trust His goodness and rest in that truth.
3. **Submit to God’s authority:** ... *Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you* (James 4:7). Resist Satan’s lies; resist his desire to make you rebel, and he will flee from you.

- 4. Follow God's plan:** *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths* (Proverbs 3:5–6). As soon as we head *away* from the Lord to follow after our own understanding, we are heading *toward* Satan's path. Satan always moves us away from God's Word, so we need to listen to the voice of Jesus in His Word!

Christ's voice in Revelation calls for action. The voice of Jesus calls out to His church for utter devotion. For example, the observance of the Lord's Table is an act of utter devotion to Christ. There we say, "We are partaking of Your body and Your blood. We are communing with You, and we are unable to live apart from You. We love You and we worship You!"

Look at Christ's indictment of the church at Ephesus: "... *I have this against you, that you have left your first love*" (Revelation 2:4). Jesus is telling us to examine ourselves to determine whether He is the most important person in our lives, like He once was. Are you still drawing near to Him as you first did? If not, He says, "*Remember ... from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works ...*" (Revelation 2:5).

Jesus wants us to continually seek Him like we did at the beginning. I always tell married couples: "Work as hard to keep your beloved as you did to win him or her." The key to a strong marriage is to never stop dating. That is an even bigger key to worship: love Christ like you did the first day you knew that your sins were washed away, and that your destiny was secure in Him.

The voice of Jesus also calls out to the lost for salvation. Any time there is a gathering with the preaching of God's Word, there should always be an acknowledgement of anyone who has not yet heard the voice of Jesus. An invitation ought to be extended to him or her to come to Christ: ... *Let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (Revelation 22:17).

Up to the very end of God's Revelation, He is still offering salvation to all who will respond to Him. In the privacy of your will, you may say yes to Jesus Christ: *Yes, He died in my place! Yes, He is the One who came to seek and save me, a lost sheep! Yes, He is my only hope and my sin is taken care of by His sacrifice.* That is how simple salvation is.

Have you responded to Christ in faith yet?

SATURDAY: Jesus Waits for Us to Hear His Voice

The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty (Psalm 29:4, emphasis added).

In Psalm 29 we hear His voice in the earth, and it is calling us to worship Him! In that psalm, the Lord reveals five elements of His eternal greatness that we are to reverence as we hear Him.

Hear the powerful and majestic voice of the Lord:

1. **Through thunder God is declaring His ownership:** ... *O you mighty ones, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness* (Psalm 29:1–2). We cannot make the sky thunder; neither can we make it stop thundering. God owns and controls the physical universe.

2. **Through thunder God is declaring His majesty:** *The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the LORD is over many waters* (Psalm 29:3). I can easily envision David high on a hillside overlooking one of those massive storms that blows in from the Mediterranean Sea. As the anvil-shaped thundercloud begins to rise, he knows he has to comfort his sheep, and get them safely into the fold before they become frightened and scatter. As he is out there with nowhere else to go, he soon hears the rumble in the distance come ever closer, and watches the frequent bolts of lightning. And then David listens in awe as the voice of the Lord thunders again and again—and he worships! If thunder is just the power of God’s voice, imagine what kind of total power He has! One might even say that thunder is only the Lord “clearing His throat”!

3. **Through thunder, God is declaring His power:** *The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire* (Psalm 29:5–7). What manner of God is He that at the very sound of His voice the earth rumbles and shakes and quakes and burns before Him?
 Have you ever seen a tree that was hit by lightning? It is literally splintered. Lightning contains hundreds of millions of volts! I had a friend who used to be a park ranger. He told me about times when he sat in the tower watching for forest fires during thunderstorms. Because the towers were grounded, he was safe. So when he saw lightning hit the rock wall around the tower, and the balls of fire tumbling along the ground, he always opened his Bible to Psalm 29:7: *The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire*. Amazing!

4. **Through thunder God is declaring His worship:** *The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth, and strips the forests bare; and in His temple everyone says, “Glory!”* (Psalm 29:8–9).
 This is not *people* who are saying “Glory!” It is all of Creation that is in the temple of God. Remember: *Jesus came to His own, and His own did not receive Him* (John 1:11). The first “His own” is neuter tense in the Greek, which means that He came into His own world. Creation always received Him. For example, trees would bow in front of Him when He spoke to them, and the sea would calm when He spoke to it. Jesus controlled the natural world, and it worshiped Him.
 Although God does not get much glory from His creatures who are created in His image, at the sound of His voice all the earth shouts “Glory!” Should not we? The next time you are in a thunderstorm, shout “Glory!” to declare your worship of the Lord from your heart!

5. Through thunder God is declaring His judgment: *The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood, and the LORD sits as King forever. The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace* (Psalm 29:10-11). God is the judge, and He is in control. When you hear the thunder and see the lightning, declare His judgment. God is going to right all wrongs. Do not try to get revenge on people. At the Flood, He destroyed those who pushed Him out of their lives, and He is going to do the same when He comes back again. That is why Psalm 29 is so very important!

Make a choice to live in hope. As we approach the end of days, I encourage you to find hope as you listen to the awesome voice of Christ, your Creator and Redeemer! Remember that the sound of the Lord as He shakes the earth is a call to reverence Him! So wholeheartedly join David in praise and worship as he says:

I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. ... Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. ... All Your works shall praise You, O LORD They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations (Psalm 145:1, 3, 10-11, 13).

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

*Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before Thee, Op'ning to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!*

*All Thy works with joy surround Thee, Earth and heav'n reflect Thy rays;
Stars and angels sing around Thee, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,
Singing bird and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in Thee.*

*Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,
Well-spring of the joy of living, Ocean-depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother—all who live in love are Thine;
Teach us how to love each other; lift us to the joy divine.*

*Mortals, join the mighty chorus which the morning stars began;
Father love is reigning o'er us, brother love binds man to man.
Ever singing, march we onward, victors in the midst of strife,
Joyful music leads us sunward in the triumph song of life.*

—Henry van Dyke, 1852–1933

Week 10—See Christ’s Face and Feel His Touch

(Revelation 1:16–17)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you see
Christ’s glorious face and feel His powerful touch!



SUNDAY: Face-to-face with Jesus

... *His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength* (Revelation 1:16, emphasis added).

There are so many pictures of Jesus in our minds. From Sunday school lessons to *The Jesus Movie*, we have countless images that float by us in life. God’s Word gives us the only exact picture of Christ’s face in the entire universe.

As the apostle John prayed and adored God through His Son, Jesus Christ, he heard a sound and turned—it was *Jesus*! But it was not the Jesus he was used to seeing, or that we think of in pictures and movies. It was the *real Lord Jesus Christ*.

First, John saw Jesus’ eyes, which were as flaming fires penetrating like laser beams. Then he heard the voice of Jesus, thunderous and big, bigger than anything on earth. After that he saw His face of glory shining “*like the sun*”—and it changed John’s life!

Something fascinating about Jesus and the sun is revealed in the first chapter of Genesis. On the fourth day of creation, God said, “*Let there be 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 (Genesis 1:14–16).

Just by Jesus speaking a few words, the sun suddenly appeared ninety-three million miles out from earth! Isn’t that absolutely amazing? It just flamed to life. Traveling at the speed of light, it may have taken about eight minutes for the first warmth and light from the sun to get to the earth. Then the moon started reflecting that light on the backside of the planet. That is phenomenal!

One of the most amazing statements in the Bible is the last five words of verse 16: *He made the stars also*. In that short sentence God describes what scientists cannot comprehend—the limitless expanse of the rest of the universe. Jesus put some of those stars in spiral galaxies, some of them in beautiful filmy nebulae, and others of them in clusters of galaxies. Then he made one hundred billion stars just in our own Milky Way Galaxy. “*He made the stars also*” reads almost like a postscript.

Among those many stars, our sun is an average “yellow” star. It is in the middle as far as size, temperature, and brightness. As you read this, think of what it must have been like for John to see Jesus’ face shining “*like the sun*”:

In the Orion constellation there are two stars of note. Rigel is 15,000 times brighter than our sun, and thus hotter and so on. Antares is 36 million times bigger! At the center, or core of our sun, things are incredibly hot. The atoms stripped of their outer electrons are so densely packed it is absolutely dark and intensely hot. In fact, it is 16 million degrees centigrade.¹

How hot is “16 million degrees centigrade”? A piece of the sun the size of a pinhead would kill you one hundred miles away because of the heat radiating from it! The energy radiated from the sun in one second is more than all the energy used on the earth since Creation!

So, on a Sunday, 1,900 years ago on Patmos—a barren speck of rock just sixteen miles square and fifteen miles from nowhere in the Mediterranean Sea—John heard a voice and turned and saw the face of Jesus shining like the sun! And what did that do to him? It flattened him: *When I saw him, I fell at His feet as dead* (Revelation 1:17).

What happens when a person comes face-to-face with Christ in all His power and glory? It smites us with an overwhelming sense of our humanity: our fallen nature and our weakness. Do you remember Isaiah’s response when he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and heard the seraphim crying out: “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!*” (Isaiah 6:3)? He said: “*Woe is me, for I am undone! ... for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*” (Isaiah 6:5).

A face-to-face encounter with Jesus Christ cannot help but strike us with His majesty and His glory. As His creatures, we would want to respond by worshiping Him, and that is exactly what John does. Have you met Jesus face-to-face? Have you responded in heartfelt worship? A genuine encounter with Jesus Christ is life changing!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, from the depth of our beings, from the center of all we are, we want to be found worthy when we stand before You face-to-face; we want to be there clothed in Your righteousness. We don’t know when You are going to come or call us home. It could be that the days written in Your book for us end this week. We pray that we would therefore be those who live for You, Lord Jesus, a life that is true and right. I pray that You, Holy Spirit, will put Your finger into the hearts*

of each one of us and point out those untoppled idols, those unforsaken sins, those unrestrained areas of flesh in our lives, and that we would say, "Lord, I don't want to be found living, talking, acting, or doing that in my last moments when You come or call for me." I pray that we would make those choices while we're thinking about getting ready to stand before You with all the redeemed, with all the angelic hosts, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." We love You, Lord! Captivate our hearts we pray! In the name of Jesus. Amen.

MONDAY: John Felt the Touch of Christ

*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But **He laid His right hand on me**, saying to me, "Do not be afraid ..."* (Revelation 1:17, emphasis added).

Have you ever considered the power of touch? At this very instant, as you use your senses to read this page, there are five trillion chemical operations occurring each second in your brain. The brain has no contact with the outside world. It is inside an ivory box of bone connected through cables coming up through the spinal column, and from the optical nerve, the auditory nerves, and all the central nervous system—from our touch to our taste. All of these come in and converge in the brain.

Inside our heads all roads lead in from our senses, five gates through which we comprehend the world about us. The capabilities of our senses are impressive! Animals and insects might outdo us in hearing (dog, bat, horse), seeing (eagle), or smelling (moth and salmon), but when our five senses are combined, we are unmatched in our sensory powers.

Our Sense of Hearing: How do we distinguish the myriad of sounds we hear? Every distinct sound has a signature of vibrations per second. Our ears can pick out 300,000 different sounds and distinguish between them.

Our Sense of Smell: It is with the second sense that we touch our world. Our noses are primitive compared to a salmon's or a moth's, but we can smell one garlic molecule in 50,000 molecules of air and our minds instantly identify what it is from memories of other occurrences. We can discern between 10,000 different odors. And, because God made our sense of smell and **sense of taste** to work together, our ability to smell is what enables us to more fully enjoy the taste of different foods!

Our Sense of Sight: It is staggering that God made us with 127 million cells in each eye. Together they could detect a single candle's light at fifteen miles; that is one photon of light to activate our eyes!

Our Sense of Touch: This is the strongest of our senses. Just to define "touch" makes it the longest entry in the English language dictionary. No word has more meanings and images. Touch is the sense most alert when we sleep. Is there any human activity that does not vitally rely on touch?

Although scientists cannot agree on how touch works in humans, they can measure it. For instance, one tap of your fingernail can discern between paper, fabric, wood, plastic, or steel. A finger can detect lines etched 1/2500th of an inch deep. It can feel even the slightest breeze that is 1/1000th of an ounce at the tip of a one-half inch hair. But those sensitivities in us, His creatures, pale in comparison with our Creator's power to sense and feel our touch.

The touch of Jesus is likewise the strongest sense we get of His power. Have you ever pondered the wonderful joy of being touched by Jesus? He reached out and touched the sinners and the sick, the demonized and the defiled, the young and the old, the living and the dead, and the hopeless and the helpless. And all were changed marvelously!

The Gospels record no less than forty times when Jesus touched individuals in His ministry. Some of the most well-known are the **touch of cleansing** a leper (Matthew 8:1–4); the **touch of liberation** for Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14–15); the **touch of completion** as multitudes pressed to touch Him (Matthew 14:36); the **touch of encouragement** for the astonished disciples (Matthew 17:7); and the **touch of sight** for Bartimaeus and his friend (Matthew 20:34).

Over sixty years after Christ's ascension, as John worshiped Christ that Sunday, he gratefully received Jesus' **touch of perfect love** in His resurrection glory. For *there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear ...* (1 John 4:18).

Have you experienced the touch of Jesus? His nail-scarred hands are reaching out to touch those who will let Him! Do you *need* the touch of Jesus? He is extending His hand to you, if you will seek Him. **Reach out by faith.** Acknowledge that God senses every fiber of your life. He can feel your needs, and by faith you can touch God. **Ask for His touch.** Only Jesus Christ can fully meet your needs, so you must go to Him. **Confess His work in you.** If He has touched you, you should admit it publicly. Have you touched God today? Has He touched you? Do you need to tell someone?

For more on the wonder of being touched by Jesus, read Mark 5:21–43. Being touched by Him is shown beautifully in that passage. It should encourage you to desire to draw ever nearer to Him through His precious Word!

TUESDAY: The Wonder of Being Touched by Jesus

Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed" (Mark 1:41, emphasis added).

The wonder of being touched by Jesus is clearly seen in Mark where some, like the grateful leper in 1:41, were touched by God in a mighty way. Ponder this familiar setting in Mark: ... *When Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea* (5:21). Now use your senses to relive the scene:

- **Feel** the rough-hewn, handmade boat, as it lay weathered on the shore.
- **See** the sun glinting off the blue-green waters of the Sea of Galilee.

- **Smell** the thick smells of fish, weeds, and wetness blended with the odors of a time when people seldom bathed.
- **Hear** the presence of numberless multitudes that swarmed around Christ like flies.
- **Taste** the excitement as they pressed upon Him so much that He couldn't get through them; so He stayed on the shore.

Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum, crashed through the crowd that had been pressing upon Jesus. As he caught sight of Christ, he ... *fell at His feet* ... (Mark 5:22)! Oh, to have that great a desire to meet with Jesus! Have you ever felt like crashing through the crowd at your church to dive at the feet of Christ—to delight in looking for Him in His Word? That is why these people experienced Him so deeply.

With complete faith, the ruler earnestly begged Jesus to come and heal his daughter: "*My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live*" (Mark 5:23b). So *Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him* (Mark 5:24).

During this time, everyone was still trying to touch Jesus, even if it was just the bottom of His robe. At this point an unknown, withered woman who had been aged by a horrible uncleanness *came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment*. For she knew that Jesus alone was her hope: "... *If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well*" (Mark 5:27–28).

Her ... *flow of blood for twelve years* ... made her unclean in the eyes of Levitical law. She ... *had suffered many things from many physicians* ... and ... *had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse* ... (Mark 5:25–26). This woman was ashamed of her uncleanness. The bleeding woman knew, as do Christians today, that Jesus alone can meet our deepest needs.

The dying woman was motivated by faith; she touched Christ, and instantly was healed of her affliction. Do you remember the sensitivity of the five senses? She *intuitively* knew that her affliction was gone. Then Jesus, ... *immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"* (see Mark 5:30, emphasis added).

What would that moment have been like? Picture being at the Rose Bowl in California for the Olympic Games, with all 100,000 people leaving at once after the games. You would be in an ocean of bodies! Can you imagine one person in that crowd saying, "Who just touched me?" It would have been a joke!

Jesus Christ is the only One who could feel the trembling, withered hand of a dying woman's touch upon the tassel of His coat. He alone can truly feel your heart's cry right now, and He has the power to make you whole! If you or a loved one fear death, or are desperate, helpless, sick, or feel unable to go any further, come to Jesus for help!

You have seen two people who had needs: Jairus, who came to Jesus for the healing of his daughter, and the aged woman, who came to Jesus to be healed of her "*flow of blood*." They

came in two ways, but both had to confess Jesus publicly. Perhaps you need to be honest before others as well. Have you ever confessed to the church that God has touched you and made you whole? If not, you should do so through baptism, which is public confession—it will change your spiritual life!

WEDNESDAY: Jesus' Greatest Touch

*She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "**Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more**" (John 8:11, emphasis added).*

In Week 5, I briefly touched on the loveliest picture I know of Christ's forgiveness—the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery. Her story, recorded for us in John 8:1–11, represents one of the most beautiful portraits of the greatest touch of Jesus, His complete cleansing and forgiveness.

As you read this retelling of that incredible moment in Christ's ministry, watch for the contrasts between man's touch and Jesus' touch; man's countenance and Jesus' countenance; man's tone of voice and Jesus' tone of voice; man's lack of mercy and Jesus' mercy. Who would you rather face?

John 8 opens early in the morning in the wide spaces of the Temple courtyard, where Jesus often taught as crowds gathered to hear Him. As the sun rose higher and coolness of the dawn began to melt away, Jesus was seated, holding the complete attention of a growing crowd. Suddenly the sound of an angry mob shatters the quietness of Christ's message.

Surging forward are well-known religious leaders, both Scribes and Pharisees. They roughly push their way through the crowd, dragging a woman toward Christ. She is dazed, unkempt, weeping, and limp as they cast her in a heap at Christ's feet.

With voices of hatred, eyes of contempt, and faces hard as stone, the accusation they brought is hurled at Christ like a spear. This woman was guilty of adultery; they were the witnesses—and she should be stoned. Silently Jesus took in the situation. The sobbing woman lay in a heap at His feet, like a garbage bag on the curb. The accusers were so much like their father the devil, who is an accuser and destroyer. Then Jesus looked at the crowd. How they needed to understand the depth of redeeming love and forgiving grace.

Jesus began to look around the circle of the accusing religious leaders, His eyes began to pierce their souls. The hatred boiling over in their souls began to burn them within. It seemed as if Jesus were looking into their minds and hearts—and they felt instantly undone before Him. The accusers felt accused, and the accused felt protected.

Then suddenly the silence was broken. Christ's admirers and haters were now captivated by the One who spoke and acted like no one had ever done. He knelt down in front of the cast-off bit of humanity that had been tossed at His feet and on her level, he began to slowly trace letters in the dust of the marble floors. This is the only time the Gospels record Jesus writing anything—but those who watched will never forget what they felt. Starting with the oldest of the

accusers, Jesus wrote a word and then one by one gazed into their eyes. Perhaps the words were pride or lust or greed or liar ... but no matter what He wrote, the effect was always the same. The touch of Jesus eyes made them blanch with a shudder of unearthly fear as they dropped the rocks they had clutched and, with downcast eyes, fled Christ's presence. The other accusers can't stop watching and trembling as they each face a personal judgment day before the judge of all.

There is the thud of stone after stone falling on the pavement. Not many of the Pharisees are left. One by one, they creep away—like animals slinking into the shadows ... shuffling off into the crowded streets to lose themselves in the multitudes.

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." But no stones have been thrown. They lie around the woman on the pavement. They have dropped them where they stood, and now she is left alone at the feet of Christ.

Only her sobbing breaks the stillness. She still has not lifted her head ... And now Christ looks at her. He does not speak for a long moment. Then, with eyes full of understanding, He says softly: "Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?" (John 8:10) And she answers, "No man, Lord."

That is all the woman says from beginning to end. She has no excuse for her conduct. She makes no attempt to justify what she has done.

And Christ, looking at her, seeing the tear-stained cheeks and her eyes red with weeping, seeing further into her heart, seeing the contrition there, says to her: "**Neither do I condemn you;** go and sin no more" (John 8:11, emphasis added).

What He says here is—not that He acquits the woman, but that He forgives her. Not that He absolves her from blame, but that He absolves her from guilt. Not that He condones the act, but that He does not condemn her for it—He forgives her instead.

Perhaps He smiles upon her, as she slowly raises her eyes, a slow, sad smile of One Who knew that He Himself has to pay the price of that absolution. And it may be that His finger writes again in the dust, tracing this time the outline of a cross or the shape of a hill—a hill shaped like a skull.

No, we do not know her name, or where she lived, or who she was. But of this we can be sure—she was never the same again. She was a changed woman from that moment. Of that we can be sure."²

God is willing to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, because the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin! The woman caught in adultery was never the same after she experienced Jesus' touch in her life! Have you received His touch—His greatest gift ever?

THURSDAY: Life in the Minor Key

... We were ***troubled on every side***. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us ... (2 Corinthians 7:5–6, emphasis added).

Most of the Bible is in the major key in which saints are fearlessly witnessing and churches are valiantly serving against all odds. As much as those portions bring great joy to our souls, side-by-side with all that wonderful testimony is the minor key of Scripture.

In the minor key accounts, God provides true glimpses into His children's weaknesses and frailties by showing how some of His greatest saints struggled with being sad, discouraged, and depressed. Yet the Lord did not correct them and tell them they were in sin. So, as we study Revelation's unveiling of the Great Tribulation coming upon this world, know that He understands if at times you struggle with anticipation of what is to come. He wants you to give your fears to Him and find living hope for the end of days!

I believe that having a better understanding of God's view of depression can encourage your heart. Think about these questions: Is it always sin that *makes* us depressed? Is it always a sin to *be* depressed? It may surprise you that God's answer to both questions is no. What do Moses, Elijah, Hezekiah, Job, Ezra, David, Jeremiah, Jonah, and Paul share in common with us today? They were all Spirit-filled servants of the Lord, and they all struggled with negative emotions.

I looked up *depression* in the *Webster's Dictionary* and found the descriptions fascinating: "(1) A state of feeling sad; a disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness, and sometimes suicidal tendencies; and (2) A reduction in activity, amount, quality, or force; a lowering of vitality or functional activity."

We must be careful to not say that anxiety, depression, discouragement, and other negative emotions are in themselves sinful. Why? God's servants have experienced these same emotions, and in Christ we see sinless anger, deep emotional distress, grief, and anguish—all of which were perfectly displayed. For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus "*began to be very distressed and troubled*" and His soul was "*deeply grieved to the point of death*" (see Mark 14:33–34 NASB). In coming to earth, He took upon Himself the form of a human with all its frailties, yet He did not sin.

We should not call each occurrence of a negative emotion sin, but neither should we stay "in the pits." The following servants of the Lord all suffered from crippling, and sometimes even paralyzing, depression:

- **Moses:** "*I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now ...!*" (Numbers 11:14–15).

- **Elijah:** *But he ... prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”* (1 Kings 19:4).
- **Hezekiah:** *Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD And Hezekiah wept bitterly* (2 Kings 20:2–3).
- **Job:** *“Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?”* (Job 3:11).
- **Ezra:** *My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word* (Psalm 119:25).
- **David:** *“Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name ...”* (Psalm 142:7).
- **Jeremiah:** *“See, O LORD, that I am in distress; my soul is troubled; my heart is overturned within me, for I have been very rebellious ...”* (Lamentations 1:20).
- **Jonah:** *... God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he ... said, “It is better for me to die than to live”* (Jonah 4:8).
- **Paul:** *... Our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us ...* (2 Corinthians 7:5–6 NASB).

When caught up in the throes of depression, emotions can run so rampant that it is difficult to think clearly. If that happens to you, like David, remember to cry out to the Lord: *... O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by* (Psalm 57:1). Jesus is the safest refuge in the universe!

FRIDAY: Temptation and Struggles Are Not Sin

[Paul and Barnabus] **strengthen[ed] the souls** of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22, emphasis added).

Yesterday we looked at various notable saints in the Bible who suffered from crippling, and sometimes paralyzing, depression. Now we’re going to look at a few examples of God’s choice servants who have likewise suffered in this manner. It may surprise you to learn that Martin Luther was among those who’ve struggled with depression.

The great hymn we all love to sing, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, was penned by the great sixteenth-century reformer, Martin Luther (1483–1546)—during his darkest days of depression. It was a testimony to God’s power to lift him out of the prison of his soul, back to hope and strength.

As a devoted pastor, he sought to bring spiritual counsel to struggling souls. His compassion for those souls shines in numerous places, including his sermons, lectures, Bible commentaries and table talks.³

Besides observing mental difficulties in others, Luther had a greater reason to affirm their reality—he also endured many periods of depression. He described his personal experience in varied terms: melancholy, heaviness, and depression; dejection of spirit, downcast, sad, and downhearted. He suffered this way for much of his life and often revealed these struggles in his works. Luther evidently did not think it a shameful problem to be hidden.

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), who lit the fires of the nineteenth-century revival movement, struggled so severely with depression that he was forced to be absent from his pulpit for two to three months a year. In 1866 he told his congregation: “I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to.” Those words were spoken in a sermon by Spurgeon whose marvelous ministry in London made him perhaps the greatest preacher England ever produced.

Dr. John Henry Jowett (1864–1923) pastored leading churches, preached to huge congregations, and wrote books that were best-sellers. In a message he confessed: “You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs, but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and equanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky.” Yet Dr. Jowett was often called in his day: “The Greatest Preacher in the English-speaking World!”

I could go on and on through the “Who’s Who” of ministry and find countless other testimonies that say the same. The point is this: Spirit-filled Christians can experience emotional problems. Some godly believers, especially those of certain temperaments, will always struggle with feeling “down.”

As we look back on history, we can conclude that many of these saints suffered because of physical conditions that prompted depression. One Christian medical doctor, who has spent his lifetime helping people, writes this:

Consider this thought experiment. Give me the most saintly person you know. If I were to administer certain medications of the right dosage, such as thyroid hormone, or insulin, I could virtually guarantee that I could make this saint anxious with at least one of these agents. Would such chemically induced anxiety be explained as a spiritual sin? What if the person’s own body had an abnormal amount of thyroid hormone or insulin and produced nervousness?⁴

We as believers should never condone willful sin, but we must learn to accept that some fellow believers may suffer from emotional symptoms that are not the result of unconfessed sin. It is possible to feel horrible, and be in great emotional anguish, and still be obedient to the Lord.

Consider what godly Job cried out in the midst of his suffering: *“For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. ... My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. ... I despise my life. ... Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household. ... But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. ... And now my life ebbs away; days of suffering grip me. Night pierces my bones; my gnawing pains never rest. ... I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer ...”* (Job 3:24; 7:6, 16; 16:7; 23:8; 30:16–17, 20 NIV).

Notice that in spite of Job’s depression, the Bible says, *In all this Job did not sin* (1:22 NIV). Moreover, God reproved his friends for accusing him of sin and for their failure to speak rightly concerning His servant (see 42:7–8). We must never forget: *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* (Proverbs 18:21). So when we notice that a sister or brother in Christ is struggling with depression, we must be careful to not be judgmental but to be an encourager instead!

SATURDAY: Share Struggles—Share Prayers

*... you also **helping together** in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many* (2 Corinthians 1:11, emphasis added).

The word *sunopourgeo*, translated “*helping together*,” is used only here in the Greek New Testament and is composed of three words: “with, under, work.” It is a picture of laborers under the burden, working together to get the job accomplished. Paul enlists the help of other believers to hold him up in his emotional, physical, and spiritual struggles. (This was in addition to the Holy Spirit’s promise in Romans 8:26 to assist us in our praying and help carry our load.)

Difficulties, especially in these end days, should draw us closer to other Christians as we share our burdens and prayer needs. When experiencing the trials of life, we need to remember what God has promised us, and what He has commanded us to do.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, there are more imperative commands than in any other paragraph in God’s Word. It is one of the clearest descriptions of the basic duties of a believer in Christ’s church. In verses 11–26, we are commanded:

- Comfort each other.
- Edify one another.
- Be at peace among yourselves.
- Warn those who are unruly.
- Uphold the weak.

- Be patient with all.
- See that no one renders evil.
- Always pursue what is good.
- Rejoice always.
- Pray without ceasing.
- In everything give thanks.
- Do not quench the Spirit.
- Do not despise prophecies.
- Test all things.
- Hold fast to what is good.
- Abstain from every form of evil.

In other words, we must take seriously Paul's command to *comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all* (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Make a choice to live in hope. What can depression, discouragement, and faintheartedness do for us? If we choose to live in hope, as we regularly cry out to the Lord, it can inspire us to some of the deepest and greatest discoveries about God we can ever make!

In perhaps his deepest depression, Martin Luther wrote one of Christendom's greatest hymns. In 1527 he wrote: "For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost."

Here is Luther's testimony about the great discoveries he made about God during his lengthy periods of being in melancholy, heaviness, depression, dejection of spirit, downcast, sad, and downhearted:

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth is His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.*

—**Martin Luther, 1483–1546**

Week 11—Fear Not! For I Am with You!

(Revelation 1:17–18)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, for the ultimate victory is Christ's, and He will never leave or forsake you!



SUNDAY: Troublesome Times Are Here

*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “**Do not be afraid**; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death”* (Revelation 1:17–18, emphasis added).

While on Patmos, John felt Christ's comforting touch, which is exactly what Jesus offers to each of us. At the end of His ministry, He promised to be with us always, even to the very end of days. Since we may be living in those actual days right now, we need to feel His calming presence—His comforting touch that removes all fear.

There are fearful times coming to this planet, but if you compare our American news with that of the national papers of the industrialized nations of the world, you can easily see that our news lacks foresight and discernment. Why is that? News reporters in other nations look at the entire world while we Americans usually focus on ourselves. Unless the news is of a catastrophic nature, like the 2004 Tsunami, our major American news sources do not generally report on global events other than the usual happenings in the Middle East. But sticking one's head in the sand when it comes to discerning the signs of the times globally will not hold back God's ultimate plan for mankind. All the events He has foretold in His Word will happen exactly as predicted, and precisely on schedule.

Every time something that was predicted in Luke 21 happens, Jesus said it should cause us to lift up our heads. Actually, the Greek words mean “to turn your body; to cause your whole body to focus upward.” Jesus said that we are headed toward such trying days that people will “expire” due to fear of things to come: “... *Men's hearts [will be] failing them from fear ... of those*

things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:26, emphasis added).

I love the color of the Greek language! In verse 26, the Greek word *apopsucho* means that their "breath or soul pops out" or "expires" because of complete fear. Isn't that a graphic word? It is not that some fearful disaster happens, and then people react by becoming afraid. No, they see it coming *toward* them and just die at the very *thought* of what is going to happen. Jesus is not referring to just the elderly, or a person who already has a bad heart. He is talking about healthy people who see the Tribulation events coming—and it literally scares them to death!

The overwhelming tribulations on the horizon will cause a "panic attack" in many healthy humans who will then expire in fear. Events like the scientific arena's flurry of concern over the solar explosion on October 28, 2003 (reported only in overseas papers) are but a small taste of things to come.

For seven days, scientists all over the world were glued to their seats watching the space weather. Then, that Tuesday, they sat up in their chairs, rubbed their eyes, and started to sweat because of anticipation of what might happen. They watched the sun bulge, the buildup of the energy, and then saw the sun explode a cloud of superheated gas equivalent to a million hydrogen bombs! It all exploded at once in one small area, then went out from the surface of the sun, and headed across the solar system away from the earth.

That explosion was the greatest solar event ever measured. It was so big that scientists didn't have descriptions that could explain its magnitude. And they didn't even get to see the fullness of the explosion because, as the sun turned, it just floated off in the opposite direction—almost as if the Lord did not want it to be seen!

God is in control. What a wonderful comfort to know that our Creator is in charge of the entire universe! Not even a tiny sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father's will (Matthew 10:29b). If it were possible for any person or thing to possess even a tiny modicum of power greater than God's, then He would cease to be our sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords! So rejoice in the fact that all authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and on earth, and in Him we live and move and have our being (Matthew 28:20; Acts 17:28)!

We need never fear because God *is* in absolute control—not only of the past and present, but also of the future!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, this is Your message: we are to have a Word-filled life in fearful times. We are not to fear terrorists, bioterrorism, economic terrorism, cancer, stalkers, somebody in the dark around our house, the future, a new job, or whatever it is. I pray that we would see that Your prescription for not fearing is meditation—a Word-filled life. For when we meditate, we know that You are with us always to the end. So help us to have a Word-filled life even in fearful times. Help us to truly understand and grab hold of that reality! In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Signs in the Sun

*“And there will be **signs in the sun** ...”* (Luke 21:25a, emphasis added).

What did Jesus mean by “signs in the sun”? I believe that the marked increase in sunspot activity and solar flares is the beginning of the horrors to come. Paal Brekke, Deputy Project Manager of the SOHO spacecraft (the big solar orbiting heliosphere study observatory which looks at the sun) had this to say about those solar explosions that occurred on October 28, 2003: “I think the last week will go into the history books as one of the most dramatic periods of solar activity we have seen in modern time.”¹ He, an unbeliever, was trying to come to grips with the significance of three additional bursts on top of the two back-to-back monster flares.

Scientists now know that all of this is a cycle. There is an eleven-year cycle of events on the sun, such as sunspot activity and solar flares. Since 1755, everything for twenty-one eleven-year cycles has been recorded by solar observatories. The sun has observable patterns; it will have numerous solar flares and then be very quiet for a season. At the moment (2006), we are four years into the quiet side, but, according to Mr. Brekke, there are signs that the sun is revving up like it never has before in history.

On March 6, 2003, the largest sunspot ever seen developed. The unusual spot created a new, giant flare almost daily, saturating the space between the sun and earth with solar X-rays, gamma rays, and protons, and creating surging waves in the solar wind that disturbed the earth’s magnetic field with unprecedented regularity. Scientists say the sunspot activity is harmless to human beings and that we are protected from radiation by the atmosphere. The only effects most of us will notice will be sporadic problems with cell phones, TV reception, and a bumpier Internet than usual. In practical terms, it is pretty much an interesting non-story. It was a non-event until the morning of Tuesday, October 28, 2003. In spiritual terms, I believe that we now face “a whole different ballgame.” Fascinating, isn’t it?

Where to Find Hope in Troublesome Times: ... *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit* (Romans 15:13). Hope comes from the living and written Word of God; as you read and meditate upon the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will apply His truths to your heart, filling you with joy and peace. For example, as you read Psalm 121 below, God will encourage you to know that He is your helper, keeper, protector, and preserver. So whenever fear attacks, be comforted by meditating on these wonderful truths:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. ... The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore (Psalm 121:1–3, 5–8).

TUESDAY: We Live in Fearful Times

*“... When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ... And **Jersualem will be trampled** by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:20, 24b, emphasis added).*

Jesus has said that Jerusalem will be a focal point globally in the end times. At the end of Luke 21:24, He was referring to where we are right now in history. After A.D. 70, Jerusalem ceased to exist as it had previously. No longer could the Jews worship God as they once had because Jerusalem had been trampled by the Gentiles. In fact, Revelation reports that there would be an abomination up on the Temple Mount, and it is there today—the Dome of the Rock!

Jesus spoke of wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences (deadly diseases), and changes in climate. He spoke of Israel as a literal place in the last days, and of Jerusalem’s rise to global prominence. Have you ever considered that Jerusalem has the second or third largest press corps in the world? Why is that? After all, Jerusalem has less than one million people, so why do they have more reporters there than anywhere, except for New York City and Washington D.C.? The only possible explanation is that the whole world is fascinated with Israel! Other nations do not like Israel being there; they are afraid of Israel because it is so disproportionate in its influence and attention.

To a science fiction enthusiast, a paraphrase of Luke 21:25–26 might read like news reports in a futuristic episode or miniseries: “The end of the world is upon us! There are troubles with the sun, moon, and stars! On earth there is distress of nations, with mass confusion, and the waves are roaring! All over the planet men and women are dying from fear!” From a Christian perspective, however, look at what Jesus says when all that happens: *“When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near”* (Luke 21:28).

There are two separate Greek verbs in verse 28. Not only are we to lift up our eyes, but we are also to turn our whole bodies toward Christ because His coming is near! Every time I hear of a major solar event, a huge earthquake, a catastrophic hurricane, or an unprecedented tidal wave, I am grieved for all those who have been snatched into eternity without knowing Christ. Yet my heart is also thrilled because such events remind me that our redemption is getting nearer!

Whenever there are signs in the sun, moon, and stars; signs on earth when the nations are in distress; and signs when fear and deadly “panic attacks” hit the planet, we should *“look up”* because Jesus said our redemption is close at hand. In Luke 21:31–33, Jesus says the generation that is alive when these things begin will be the final generation, and will see His coming—if they survive!

Where to Find Hope in Fearful Times: More and more we see the reflection of society’s fears in apocalyptic-themed films. From some of the early global disaster movies in the 1980s and 1990s, such as “Apocalypse Now” to more recent ones like “Day After Tomorrow,” there are fearful themes being watched and thought about widely by people on this doomed planet.

Sometimes just reading those titles is enough to scare anyone who is not grounded in the Word of God!

God has an offer for those who live in fearful times. More than any other prohibition in Scripture, He repeatedly calls out to us, “Fear not!” To conquer fear, a truly wise person will earnestly pray: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer* (Psalm 19:14; see also Proverbs 3:21–26).

WEDNESDAY: The Antidote for Fearfulness

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear ... (Psalm 56:3–4, emphasis added).

We live in a world that is possessed by fear. The “spirit of fear” is all around us—even in unexpected places. For example, once I was standing in line next to someone and was about to give my order when the clerk looked me right in the eye and said, “I know what you want.” She then proceeded to tell me what I wanted to order. I asked her, “How did you know that?” She replied, “I am a psychic.” “If that is really true,” I told her, “I am sorry for you. You are going to have a bad ending.”

That clerk didn’t understand where I was coming from, so I continued, “The psychic realm is from the devil, and if that is who you are associated with, God says you are going to have a very bad ending.” As she was confronted with the Word of God, her eyes widened and got hard as she exclaimed, “You are wrong!” A pastor from that town, in line behind me, whispered in my ear, “Don’t you know that woman is a practicing witch?” And I said, “Well, I found out, didn’t I?”

We live in a world filled with darkness. Therefore, God repeatedly tells us: “Fear not!” We are to live in constant touch with the God of heaven so that no matter what happens we can walk in boldness. I therefore challenge you, from the Word of the living God, to live what I call “the Word-filled life.” This is what Paul described in Ephesians 5 as a Spirit-filled life, and in Colossians 3:16 he said to *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*

God offers His presence and influence to permeate each of us, for that is what the Word-filled life is all about. It means letting God take total control of us, much like that psychic has let the devil control her. To use biblical words, in a positive supernatural sense, God wants to utterly possess our reins, the very center of our feelings and passions. This applies even in fearful times, for that is when we should be most confident that we know Him. The Word-filled life is an anchor during those distracting times when the whole world seems to be falling apart around us.

Joshua is a wonderful example of how to conquer fear by living the Word-filled life. In Joshua 1:1–3, God Himself commissioned Joshua to be the head of His army on earth—Israel. Then God promised: “*Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you*” (vv. 3, 5, emphasis added).

Because it is natural to be afraid when facing what Joshua was facing, God reminded him: ***“Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may ... do ... all the law which Moses My servant commanded you ... that you may prosper wherever you go”*** (Joshua 1:6–7, emphasis added).

God not only commanded Joshua to not fear, but He also told him what to do to be successful: ***“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may ... do ... all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and ... have good success”*** (Joshua 1:8, emphasis added).

In light of the fact that Joshua was a soldier, how could God command him to meditate on the Scriptures day and night? Was he supposed to carry a scroll along with his sword and shield? Can you imagine trying to lug one of those things around while trying to fight at the same time? No, God intended that Joshua *meditate* on His Word. The Lord expected him to absorb His words into his mind, into his heart, and be saying or thinking upon them constantly. In other words, he was commanded to be involved in Scripture memory and meditation. Why was that so important?

Meditation is the key to success. Whether it is business, the arts, homemaking, relationships, a military campaign, or whatever, meditation is God’s prescription for success in any endeavor. If you want to succeed, you need not pay for a seminar to inspire you—just learn to meditate faithfully on the Scriptures. You will always succeed if God is with you and your mind and heart are filled with His Word.

Living a Word-filled life will conquer any fears you might have. Meditating on God’s precious Word will provide the needed assurance that Jesus is with you always, even to the very end of life!

THURSDAY: Joshua’s Plan

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night ...” (Joshua 1:8a, emphasis added).

Joshua’s hectic schedule and constant life on the road, heading to and from battles, never stopped him from spending time with the Lord twice daily. How did General Joshua Ben-Nun keep this up when he became a career military and political leader?

Joshua started a lifelong habit when he was a young man: ... [Moses’] ... *servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle* (Exodus 33:11). What was that habit? He loved to spend time at the Tent of Meeting (similar to church and Sunday school), which was the representation of God’s presence. In today’s vernacular, you could say that Joshua formed a habit in his youth of hanging around church and the fellowship of God’s saints. He was different from the typical young person of today. He did not hang around with the crowd; he preferred to hang around with his Creator, the Lord God of the universe. When he was older, the habit of investing time for God to the exclusion of other activities never left him.

Joshua obeyed God's command: *"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it ..."* (Joshua 1:8a). Having made a habit as a young man to love God's presence, he immediately followed the Lord's command when He said, "I want you to let My Word be in you so full that it overflows!" In other words, Joshua obediently cultivated the Word-filled life by meditating upon and loving God's Word.

Joshua stayed with it to the end: *"... Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15, emphasis added). Do you know why Joshua could make such a majestic statement—one that we love to hang on our walls? Because, in his youth, he purposed that he would always love God and linger in His presence, even to the neglect of the crowd. He continually kept God's Word in his heart and mind, and that is why he could stay with it to the end. Thus, no matter what any other family did, Joshua and his family determined to stay faithful to the Lord.

Whom do you serve? Ask yourself these questions: *Am I lingering in God's presence? Am I writing His Word on my heart so that I don't fear? Am I committed to saying, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"?*

The most powerful form of leadership is not the leadership of position: *I am the manager*. It is not the leadership of expertise: *I know more than everybody else*. It is the leadership that is impossible to be challenged: the leadership of character, living a life that people *want* to follow. That is what Joshua had.

Are God's words stuck to your heart, your mind, your mouth? That is what the Lord wants. Then you can lead your family God's way. Fearful times are coming, but don't get swept up by the spirit of fear all around us because *fear is not from God* (2 Timothy 1:7)! So remember to meditate upon the promises the Lord has made!

FRIDAY: Joshua's Command

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9, emphasis added).

When Moses died, and Joshua was commissioned to be the head of God's army on earth, it must have seemed like a formidable task to him! Of this challenge, John MacArthur writes:

Joshua was approaching 90 years of age when called on by God to lead a seven plus year war against entrenched enemies. At age 90, Joshua had graduated from prep school. He had followed Moses for 40 years, everywhere he went. He had learned to obey and see God at work in protecting the nation of Israel, providing for their daily needs. But now the legendary presence of that monumental man from Egypt is gone.

There were giants, there were huge walled cities and vast armies, and there was this group of people that hadn't been exactly cooperative with Moses. And what would be

a normal human response? FEAR. And that is exactly what the Lord confronts and comforts Joshua about—be courageous, don't fear since I am with you.

God speaks to Joshua, and gives him a promise—Joshua 1:9. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”²

When the Lord God the Son, the commander of the hosts of the Lord, came and spoke to Joshua, He called him to lead the nation and to perform all the conquests ahead. Think about what a monumental task that involved: Joshua was to lead an untrained army of three million into a hostile territory and do frontal attacks on established armies, cities, and walled towns. Imagine coming up to a forty-foot-high wall with your bow and arrow and saying, “Alright you guys, you might as well surrender now. We're here to take over your city!”

Joshua's army didn't have aerial bombardment drones or M-16s; these farmers and herdsman had only arrows, slingshots, and spears. So this was a fearful prospect indeed—for *all* Israelites! Therefore, God told Joshua in verse 9: “I don't want you to be dismayed or afraid. I want you to know that I, the Lord, am with you. And the way you will experience My presence is by meditating on My Word. Let it fill and overflow your heart!”

Fearfulness is a common malady. I meet people all the time who are terribly afraid. In fact, a while ago, one young man ran up to me and announced, “I heard a sound in the closet!” Of course, since he was only six years old at the time, his being afraid came as no surprise. (The sound was his sister playing with her LEGO® set, but he thought it was a monster.) Now then, if you are six, afraid of the dark, and you suddenly hear strange sounds in the closet, a fear response is normal. But should you still be that fearful in a few more years, that is bad news. Therefore, the Lord says to be progressively letting His Word richly dwell in you. Being a Word-filled believer will keep you from fearing terrorist attacks, ill health, lack of security, and an unknown future. God does not want us living in constant fear, so He tells us plainly, “Fear not!”

There is one solution for facing trouble: take God with you. There is one antidote for fearfulness: experience God's presence as you live out the Word-filled life!

SATURDAY: Fear Not!

*“**Fear not**, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; **You are Mine.** When you pass through the waters, **I will be with you**; ... When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God ...”* (Isaiah 43:1b-3a, emphasis added).

It is just like our Lord to speak to us when we need Him the most. His tender “Fear not!” can calm the storm in our hearts regardless of the circumstances around us. Consider how He assured these great saints: (Emphasis added in the verses below.)

- **Abraham:** ... *The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward”* (Genesis 15:1).
- **Isaac:** *And the LORD ... said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you ...”* (Genesis 26:24).
- **Jacob:** *So He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there”* (Genesis 46:3). In other words, God said to Jacob, “Don’t worry! I am running this.”
- **Daniel:** ... *“O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!”* (Daniel 10:19).
- **Mary:** *Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God”* (Luke 1:30). Do you know what that word “favor” is? It is grace. If you are saved, you have been graced with *grace*! Thus, there is no need to fear.
- **Peter:** ... *And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men”* (Luke 5:10).
- **Paul:** *“Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you”* (Acts 27:24). That was when he was in the storm.

I love highlighting verses like these in my Bible so that when fearful times come, whatever shape they take, I have an instant source to remind me of God’s promises! The next time you are afraid, and fear comes over you as you feel alone and defeated, claim by faith the presence of the Lord, for He truly is with you.

Do you recall that Hebrews 13:5—*“I will never leave you nor forsake you”*—is from Joshua 1:5? God never changes: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). God said to Joshua, “I have been with you in the past, and I will never leave you. I am right by you, and I want you to experience My presence. When you feel My presence you will not fear.” He says the same to us today!

Isaiah 41:10 is a wonderful promise: *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”* Have you caught the connection that “fear not” always comes with an “I am with you”? As parents, we like to say that to our children, don’t we? During storms in the night when my little ones have felt insecure, I have comforted them by saying, “Daddy’s here!” Oh, it has been so sweet! I remember a precious time when my youngest, Elizabeth, was troubled about something, so I went into her room and said, “I am here, Elizabeth!” I loved it when I saw her relax, crawl back in that tiny little bed, and snuggle up to her blanket once more. She felt as secure as

if she were in Fort Knox. She simply had forgotten for a moment that Daddy was there, but once she was reassured, she could rest once more.

As a beloved child of God, when you are afraid, cry out to Him, “Abba, Father!” (Romans 8:15). Since “Abba” is the equivalent of the English words “Daddy” or “Papa,” listen for His comforting voice as He says to you, “Fear not! Daddy’s here!”

Make a choice to live in hope. “*Fear not!*” is the most repeated negative prohibition in the Bible, used no less than seventy-two times. Fear is not from God, for He *has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7). Fear comes from our flesh; it surrounds us in the world, and it is the realm of the devil. So when the signs of end times multiply, and you are feeling anxious or fearful, ask God for His peace ... *which surpasses all understanding* ... (Philippians 4:7).

Jesus says to you: “Do you want to live in hope during fearful times? Have a Word-filled life, and you will experience My presence as never before—for I am your eternal refuge and hope.”

I exhort you to meditate upon the words of this beautiful song, and then worshipfully sing these praises to the Lord!

Jesus the Very Thought of Thee

*Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.*

*No voice can sing, no heart can frame,
Nor can the mem’ry find
A sweeter sound than Jesus’ name,
O Savior of mankind!*

*O Hope of ev’ry contrite heart!
O joy of all the meek!
To those who fall, how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!*

*But what to those who find? Ah! This,
No tongue or pen can show
The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.*

—*Latin Hymn, 12th Century,*
Tr. Edward Caswall, 1814–1878

Week 12—See the Risen Christ at Work

(Revelation 1:9–20)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you see the risen Christ at work in your life!



SUNDAY: What Is Jesus Doing Today?

I, John, ... on the island ... called Patmos ... was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

*Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands: One **like the Son of Man**; clothed with a **garment down to the feet** and **girded** about the chest **with a golden band**. His head and **hair** were **white like wool**, as **white as snow**, and; His **eyes like a flame of fire**; His **feet** were **like fine brass**, as if refined in a furnace, and; His **voice as the sound of many waters**; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His **countenance was like the sun shining in its strength**.*

*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right **hand on me**, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, ... which are, and ... which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars ... and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches" (Revelation 1:9–20, emphasis added).*

In this week's devotionals, I invite you to see Jesus anew with me—as John did that Lord's Day when he came face-to-face with the risen and glorified Christ! We, too, can be comforted by

knowing that Jesus identified Himself as “*I am He who lives, and was dead, and ... am alive forevermore*” (Revelation 1:18a).

Think about it: Jesus is *alive*! And since He is alive, He is doing the same things now as He did when He was with the disciples physically, for He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Oh, how John needed that reminder!

To best understand what Jesus is doing now, let us look at the only eyewitness account that describes the ascended and glorified Christ of heaven. Over sixty years after Resurrection Sunday, a meeting took place. From God’s flawless record of that Lord’s Day meeting, we can derive seven perfect descriptions of what Jesus looks like. From those seven descriptions we discover exactly what He was doing then as well as now. Notice that each of these seven glorified descriptions matches a ministry of Christ’s while He was on earth:

1. **like the Son of Man** (v. 13a): This describes Christ’s *humanity*—so He can truly have compassion upon us.
2. **garment down to the feet, girded ... with a golden band, hair white as wool and snow** (vv. 13b-14b): This describes Christ’s *priesthood*—so He can truly forgive us.
3. **eyes like a flame of fire** (v. 14c): This describes Christ’s *omniscience*—so He can truly see us where we are.
4. **feet like fine brass** (v. 15a): This describes Christ’s *omnipotence*—so He can truly protect us.
5. **voice as the sound of many waters** (v. 15b): This describes Christ’s *omnipresence*—so He can truly encourage us.
6. **countenance like the sun shining in its strength** (v. 16b): This describes Christ’s *majesty*—so He can truly be worshiped by us.
7. **hand on me** (vv. 17b-20): This describes Christ’s *touch*—so He can truly help us.

What did Jesus do on earth? As we see Christ’s risen and glorified humanity, it is a reminder of what He did on earth (Revelation 1:13a)—*the Son of Man* had compassion for us weak and wandering humans!

Anyone felt they could come to Him because He was approachable: the woman with the blood disorder; the leper; the father with the dying daughter; the centurion with the sick servant; the two blind men sitting by the road; the great multitude who were like sheep without a shepherd; and many, many more. Of the twelve times “compassion” is used in the New Testament, it always speaks of Jesus.

What is Jesus doing now? He is having compassion upon us in all our needs! For in His humanity, He experienced what it is like to be us (but without sin): ... *In that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted* (Hebrews 2:18).

This same Son of Man who stood in the midst of the seven lampstands—which speak of His church—visits us today. When we gather together in His name, He checks our hearts to see if we come to worship Him with our “first love,” or if we have a spiritually cold heart. When we come into His house with clean hearts and prepared to seek Him, this God of all comfort reaches out to encourage His needy children so that we can also comfort others who are in trouble (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

Are you weak? Jesus understands. Are you afraid? Jesus is acquainted with all that you face. Are you alone? Jesus experienced the long loneliness of the Garden of Gethsemane, the wilderness temptation, and those horrific hours of darkness on the cross. He knows what it is like to be alone.

I could go on and on with examples of the risen and glorified Christ’s compassion! But my point is this: Jesus knows how to identify with your humanity, and He wants you to experience the power of His victory—if you will just invite Jesus to be at work in you!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, I pray that this beautiful, glorious picture that John saw of You, oh Christ, would be burned into our hearts and that we would choose to meet with You, the risen Christ, every day, all through each day, until You come or call for us. I pray that Your Spirit will draw and move and work in our hearts today. May those who don’t know You humbly say, “God be merciful to me, a sinner. Cleanse me! I turn in faith from my sins to you, oh Christ!” For those who do know You, may we realize that You are compassionate, honest, and come to us in our time of need. May this be a wonderfully encouraging study as we meet the risen Christ this week. We love You and worship You! In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Christ’s Risen and Glorified Priesthood

*But He ... has **an unchangeable priesthood**. Therefore He is ... able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them* (Hebrews 7:24–25, emphasis added).

As we see Christ’s risen and glorified priesthood, we are reminded that He truly can forgive us (Revelation 1:13b-14b)!

What did Jesus do on earth? He forgave sins as pictured in the healing of the leper who knelt before Him saying that, if He wanted to, He could cleanse him. And Jesus, full of compassion, said to him, “*I am willing; be cleansed*” (see Mark 1:40-45; emphasis added).

To the paralytic who was lowered on his bed into that crowded house in Capernaum, Jesus said, “*Son, your sins are forgiven you*” (see Mark 2:1–5).

To the woman caught in adultery, when her accusers left, Jesus said to her, “*Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more*” (see John 8:1–11).

That same Jesus, the Son of Man and Son of God, has promised to be with us always, “... *even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). He is not a distant, unknowable, infinite Creator God. No, He is with us always!

Because the Jesus who is with us is the risen and glorified Son of Man, He can truly have compassion on us because He knows our frame, *that we are dust* (Psalm 103:14). Because He knows our weaknesses so well, His most frequent emotion is compassion. He is literally “moved within.” The Bible says that Jesus was moved both physically and emotionally when He saw people.

Do you truly understand the depth of love that Jesus Christ has for us? God Himself is moved with compassion for you and me, and He longs for us to realize that He is with us as the Son of Man!

What is Jesus doing now? He is still forgiving sins: ... *We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, [so] let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin* (Hebrews 4:14–15).

As we saw in Hebrews 7:24–25 at the beginning of this devotional, because Jesus has *an unchangeable priesthood* He is able to *save to the uttermost* those who come to Him in faith because He *always lives to make intercession* for us!

Do you feel defiled? He alone can forgive and cleanse. Do you feel the fear of future judgment? He can forever take away that penalty you deserve. So trust in Him, and then rejoice in your risen and glorified High Priest!

TUESDAY: Christ’s Risen and Glorified Omniscience

... *When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then **He saw them straining at rowing**, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea ...* (Mark 6:47–48, emphasis added).

As we see Christ’s risen and glorified omniscience—His infinite understanding and insight with his *eyes like a flame of fire*—it is a reminder that He can truly see us wherever we are (Revelation 1:14c)!

What did Jesus do on earth? In His omniscience, He always knew where His disciples were and what they needed. (See also Matthew 14:22–33 and John 6:15–21.) Jesus Christ’s laser-like eyes penetrated through the storms of His disciples’ lives that threatened them with darkness, clouds, and overwhelming difficulties. His eyes saw right into the depths of their souls, and all that they were thinking and feeling. But He did not stop there; He faithfully and lovingly met with them in their times of need.

What is Jesus doing now? Jesus is still meeting His children in their storms and weaknesses—when they are feeling “at the end of themselves.” Do you realize that such dark periods can actually be our best times? How is that possible? That is not only when He is the closest, but it is also when we get to experience *Him*. Although He couldn’t get any closer than He already is, we become more aware of His presence when we are in trouble and struggling.

This glorified and risen Christ, with His eyes of fire, knows our every fear, every weakness, and every detail of our lives so that He can truly help us. So we should ... *come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16, emphasis added).

A little later in our study of Revelation, we will see Jesus talking to the church in Laodicea, saying, “*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). Holman Hunt’s famous painting of Jesus rapping against a door is still in the British Art Gallery; it is one of the most beautiful of biblical paintings. His picture portrays only Jesus’ head with Him listening and knocking on the door. The curious thing about that picture is that there is no handle on the *outside*. Why? Because Jesus wants us to open the door of our hearts and let Him *in*!

Hebrews 4:16 tells us that He offers mercy and grace in time of need. Sometimes God comes to our rescue without being asked, but He usually waits until we call out to Him for help. Jesus wants to commune with us in our stormy periods so that He can give us His wisdom, strength, and insight. He wants us to understand “the big picture” of His plan for our lives so that we are not just down here operating on our own. His ultimate plan is to work freely in us ... *both to will and to do for His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13).

Through His *eyes like a flame of fire*, Jesus knows your every detail, every fear, and every weakness—and longs to help you. Will you let Him *in* today?

WEDNESDAY: Christ’s Risen and Glorified Omnipotence

*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but **God** is faithful, who **will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it* (1 Corinthians 10:13, emphasis added).

As we see Christ’s risen and glorified omnipotence—His infinite power and strength with *feet like fine brass*—it is a reminder that He can truly protect us in every situation (Revelation 1:15a).

What did Jesus do on earth? He was always protecting His own by delivering them from danger, and stilling their storms (see Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25). When His disciples were afraid in their “rocking boat,” He came to them *walking* on the sea. Isn’t that interesting? He showed His strength and power through His *feet*!

When John saw Christ like *the Son of Man*, he saw His High Priestly garment and then His *eyes like a flame of fire*. Those eyes must have been so awesome to him that he had to avert

his gaze, so he looked down and saw Christ's feet—His *feet like fine brass*. That strength and power came to His disciples across the storm, across their problem, and demonstrated Christ's omnipotence!

What is Jesus doing now? He ever lives to intercede for us to protect and help us in every danger we face! He is omnipotently able to save to the uttermost!

Have you ever *really* thought about the fact that Jesus Christ, the God of the universe, is praying for *you*? What an incredible ministry! What Christ did in Bible times, He does now: He prays that our faith will not fail. Christ our refuge has the power to deliver you and me from danger, and to still the storms in our lives. There is no temptation or trial that is beyond His strength and power to conquer.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 the words “overtaken you” are very interesting. They mean that temptation is chasing us until we are in the grave. Our flesh is continually trying to come up behind us and trip us up: *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death* (James 1:14–15 NASB).

When the flesh and the lust keep talking to our will until we say, “All right—just this once I am going to give in,” lust conceives and brings forth sin; for sin is when we yield willfully to the temptation.

We will be tempted in proportion to how much we are feeding our lusts. For example, every time we get angry, that lust is fed and will only grow stronger. Whenever we give in to impatience, that, too, feeds the lust and it will grow as well. Each time we give in to materialism, that lust will all the more tighten its tenacious hold on us. The only way to break free is to *quit* feeding whatever it is that is dragging us down. If we starve whatever lust plagues us, we will have fewer and fewer temptations, and thus grow stronger in Christ instead.

Remember this: temptation itself is not sin—it is merely a reflection of the strength of our lust and how much we have fed it. That is why mature Christians mortify their lusts by constantly saying no, thereby starving and putting to death all that struggle.

To form the habit of mortifying lusts, we must stay alert to the devil's schemes to entice us. Temptation will always come through one of these three channels of temptation in the spiritual world: (1) **Lust of the flesh**—fulfilling a legitimate desire (like sexual desires) in an illegitimate way (like fornication); (2) **Lust of the eyes**—the constant desire for more and more of the finer things of life; and (3) **Pride of life**—the hunger for applause or the accolades of others—the arrogance of an independent spirit that competes with God for control and glory.

God is faithful: the Son of Man feels compassion; the Great High Priest, wearing that priestly robe, is ready to forgive our sins and cleanse us; Christ's penetrating eyes always know where we are, and exactly what we need; His omnipotent feet like brass will powerfully provide a way for us to escape whatever temptation or trial in which we find ourselves.

“A way of escape” is the omniscient One who says, “You don't have to commit to that sin; you don't have to yield to that temptation. You don't have to give in to that trial. You don't have to

feed your lusts because I am here for you to give you all the power you need to resist the devil, and flee from him.”

Martin Luther used to say: “When the devil knocks with temptation, I send Jesus to answer the door. And Jesus says: ‘Yes’? The devil says ‘I’m coming for Martin Luther,’ to which Jesus says, ‘Martin doesn’t live here any more—I do.’”

My Heart—Christ’s Home, by Robert Boyd Munger, is a book about giving up every room in our lives so that there are no locked doors that we don’t open up to Jesus. As you completely yield yourself to Him, you will find hope that whatever you’ve been struggling with can become a sweet memory of triumph! Have you given up every room to Christ yet—or are you still reserving a nook or two for yourself? If you will yield to Jesus, you’ll gain the precious fulfillment of His promise to be with you, to provide a way to experience triumph, and not defeat.

THURSDAY: Christ’s Risen and Glorified Omnipresence

“... *I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20, emphasis added).

As we see Christ’s risen and glorified omnipresence—His presence in all places at all times with a *voice as the sound of many waters*—it is a reminder that He is always speaking to people at their time of greatest need (Revelation 1:15b). His voice can be heard anywhere, for He is everywhere present, and can thus truly encourage us.

What did Jesus do on earth? He was always meeting people’s most desperate needs. Consider Mary who went to the empty tomb as sorrow and confusion flooded her mind with all the memories of Jesus. He had loved her, forgiven her, and made her many promises. But now He seemed to be so far away, and all those things seemed distant to Mary. Mary *needed* to see Jesus. That is why she was last at the cross and first at the tomb. Mary came needing Him, and now she would be the first to see the risen Christ!

What strength did Mary need? She needed to believe what she knew. She *knew* He promised that He would rise again, but she just didn’t believe it. But when she heard the One whom she thought was the gardener call her name, she instantly recognized Him! For Jesus says, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (John 10:27). Then Mary *believed*, and had a wonderful time of worship! (See John 20:13–16.)

Now let’s look at another person who had a great need—Peter. Peter also longed to hear the voice of the Lord. He, too, needed to hear that risen and glorified voice as *the sound of many waters*!

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And He said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:15–17).

Peter was grieved because Jesus asked three times. (Everything in threes might have bothered him because he could not forget his thrice betrayal of Jesus—it was such a deep wound!)

Jesus knew that Peter needed His special touch that day. If Jesus had only asked him once if he loved Him, Peter might have thought: *Did He really mean that everything is all right?* If He asked just twice, again Peter might think: *He says all is well, but I’m not sure ...* But Peter sensed that Jesus was tracking with him: “Peter, I knew that you denied Me three times, so I want you to tell Me you love Me three times so that you will have peace that this thing is all taken care of—and that you will now be that one to strengthen the brethren.” Oh, how the grieving Peter *needed* to hear that reassurance of Christ’s love and forgiveness, and that he was *not* being set aside in his ministry!

What is Jesus doing now? Jesus, with His omnipresent voice *as the sound of many waters*, always comes to those who need Him. No matter where you are in life, Jesus says to you, “I am with you always! I am there; and you will hear My voice as I speak to you!”

He will never leave your side so that He can encourage and help you at any place and at any time. All you have to do is to invite Him to come to your rescue!

FRIDAY: Christ’s Risen and Glorified Majesty

[When Jesus calmed the sea] *those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God”* (Matthew 14:33, emphasis added).

As we see Christ’s risen and glorified majesty—with His *countenance like the sun shining in its strength*—it is a reminder that He desires our reverence and worship (Revelation 1:16b).

What did Jesus do on earth? He was always inviting the worship of those who loved Him. He performed miracles (that which only God can do) to cause those who witnessed them to be overwhelmed with wonder. Christ is glorious in His majesty and power, and He reminds us of that truth so we can truly worship Him.

Christ’s majesty produces a sense of awe: [Jesus] *went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled* (Mark 6:51).

When Simon Peter saw the abundance of fish, where there had been none before, ... *he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”* (Luke 5:8). From this, we can see that Christ’s majesty brings conviction.

On the Isle of Patmos, after only one look at Jesus, John simply crumbled in awe and wonder-filled worship at His feet (Revelation 1:17a)! Christ’s majesty commands worship.

When Jesus performed miracles such as healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, or restoring eyesight, people responded in wonder and worshiped Him. The majestic Son of Man and Son of God is always waiting for His children to lavish their love upon Him and worship Him! (See Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:52; and Philippians 3:3.)

What is Jesus doing now? He continues to remind us of His glory so that we will be inspired to worship Him with all our heart, strength, mind, and soul! Jesus wants us, like the psalmist, to spontaneously and joyously exclaim: *Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing ... psalms to Him; talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD!* (Psalm 105:1–3).

Are you honoring the risen and glorious Jesus in all His majesty and power? Why not pause to worship Him in adoration as you quietly sing the majestic words of this song to Him!

Crown Him with Many Crowns

*Crown Him with many crowns, The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark! How the heav'nly anthem drowns All music but its own:
Awake, my soul, and sing Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King Thro' all eternity.*

—*St. 1, 3, 4, Matthew Bridges, 1800–1894*
St. 2, Godfrey Thring, 1823–1903

SATURDAY: Christ's Risen and Glorified Touch

*When Jesus departed ... two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" ... Then **He touched their eyes**, ... **And their eyes were opened** ... (Matthew 9:27, 29–30a, emphasis added)).*

As we see Christ's risen and glorified touch, it is a reminder that He holds His church and guards its message and its messengers (Revelation 1:16a; 17b–20). He is always there to provide help in the time of need—as He did with the two blind men who needed His healing touch!

What did Jesus do on earth? He was always touching those He loves at their point of need: Jesus touched Peter when he was sinking on the sea and cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30); He touched the leper by cleansing him at his direst moment of decay (Luke 5:12); He touched Thomas when he was filled with doubt (John 20:28); and He touched John when he was overwhelmed with fear (Revelation 1:17–18).

That was 2,000 years ago, which seems so long ago and so far away. But we need not live so distant from the quietness of that garden on Resurrection morning, because the truth of the Resurrection is that Jesus is *alive*! And since He is alive, He is doing the same things as He did then.

Did you catch that? Jesus wants us to know that He is still doing just what He did that morning, and in the days that followed. So much of His ministry involved assuring the disciples of what they already knew, and encouraging them to do what He left them here to do. Have you met again the risen Christ?

What is Jesus doing now? Jesus wants us to see Him, to believe Him, and then respond to His work in us through His Word. Are you willing to see Jesus anew? You can experience all that He wants to do in your life if you will invite Him to be at work in you. He is always there to touch you, lift you, encourage you, restore you, and remind you that all that He promised is true.

Jesus, who was always inviting worship from those who loved Him back then, who was inviting it on the Isle of Patmos around sixty years after His Resurrection, is still waiting for us to crumble in reverent worship before Him.

As Jesus left the earth, the last thing His beloved disciples saw was His exit as He went up out of sight with outstretched hands lifted up in blessing. In that gesture, He was trying to convey this message: “I just want to pour out My blessing on you! I want to give you everything you need, and that is the last thing I want you to think about when you remember Me going back to My Father!”

What was their response? They worshiped Him and then went back to Jerusalem (see Luke 24:50-52)! They didn’t go to some distant place; they went home. That is what worship does; it doesn’t take us off to mountaintops where we live an unreal life, like in a monastery somewhere. No, we go back into our real world with great joy. Luke 24:53 says that they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. That is what worship does: “*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve*” (Matthew 4:10b).

We have it all mixed up in the twenty-first century; we serve God and hope we get around to worship; however, most of the time we don’t. But Jesus said, “Worship Me *before* you do that ministry. Then, as you serve, you will be full of joy and thanksgiving!” Jesus is waiting for you and me to lavish our loving worship on Him!

As a father, I love to give my children what they want. I ask them, “What can I do for you? How can I help you? What would you like?” I also love to do things that please my wife, Bonnie! If I, a frail, sinful, fallen human, long to do these things for those I love—how much more will our heavenly Father give us good gifts? (See Matthew 7:7–11.)

Make a choice to live in hope. Have you met the risen Christ? Do you see Him as the compassionate “*Son of Man*”? Do you understand that He is the High Priest who forgives, cleanses, and doesn’t condemn you? Do you recognize Him as the One with penetrating *eyes like a flame of fire* who always sees you, and omnisciently knows everything about you? Do you see those *feet like fine brass* as He omnipotently comes in power to meet you in your storms? Do you hear His omnipresent *voice as the sound of many waters* that is always able to talk to you in any situation? Do you see His *countenance like the sun shining in its strength* that is so full of majesty that you crumble before Him in worship? Can you say, like John, “I feel the gentle touch of His *hand on me*”?

The risen and glorified Christ wants to be all that to you. So He is telling you, this very day, “Just like I was in Bible times, I still am today. And I want to always be with you!”

I hope that you will invite Jesus Christ into every part of your life and say, “Risen Christ, see me; come to me! I bow before You; touch me! I need You!” I encourage you to then make this beautiful song by John Newton the prayer of your heart:

How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds

*How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away His fear, And drives away his fear.*

*It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest, And to the weary, rest.*

*Dear name—the rock on which I build.
My shield and hiding place;
My never-failing treasure, filled
With boundless stores of grace,
With boundless stores of grace.*

*Jesus, my shepherd, brother, friend,
My prophet, priest, and King.
My Lord, my life, my way, my end,
Accept the praise I bring, Accept the praise I bring.*

—John Newton, 1725–1807

Week 13—Hear Christ's Message

(Revelation 2–3)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you hear Christ's message in Revelation!



SUNDAY: Hearing God's Voice

*God, who ... spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, **has in these last days spoken to us by His Son**, whom He has appointed heir of all things ...* (Hebrews 1:1–2, emphasis added).

When Congress “pulled the plug on NASA’s elaborate search for radio signals from alien life,” a newspaper reported: “The American scientific community is mourning the loss of NASA’s elaborate search for radio signals from alien life. Some speculate that alien intelligence might beam vast streams of coded information, a virtual encyclopedia galactica, with insights into *the origin of the universe and immortality*.”¹ (Emphasis added.) The SETI (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence) project had been an American scientific community priority for many years. Because of the evolutionary belief system so prominent in our culture, there is also a desire to find more highly evolved life forms. Some even hope that such aliens can provide solutions to help solve the ever-increasing problem of violence in our society.

The violence issue is unsolvable, however, unless people turn their lives over to their Creator. What our culture is experiencing is exactly what the apostle Paul predicted: in the last days people will be ... *without self-control, brutal* ... (2 Timothy 3:3).

Whether it is in the scientific or the social realm, our world is desperately searching for answers. Yet they continue to show an absolute disregard for the indisputable fact that there is already a stream of infinite knowledge available. You see, God has coded all the answers to man’s questions in His Book—a virtual stream of encyclopedic galactica for which we do not even need to spend

hundreds of millions of dollars for radar dishes to receive. The highest intelligence of the universe has already beamed us about our origin, and He's freely offered immortality to all!

The answer to all life's struggles is in God's Word. Did you know that 2,000 years ago Jesus wrote some letters to you as a member of His beloved church? He sent them by way of the last living apostle, John. These letters were a group message, customized for seven churches that represented all the churches then as well as now.

If you were to ask any Bible student how many epistles (letters) are in the New Testament, the answer would probably be twenty-one: thirteen authored by Paul, plus Hebrews, which appears anonymous; and the seven "general epistles" by Peter, James, John, and Jude.

The seven most important letters in the Bible are usually overlooked—the seven authored by Jesus personally, and sent to us individually. For many reasons, those seven letters, comprising chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, are probably the most important part of the Bible for you and me. For in them, and in chapters like the following, Jesus has written the secrets of: how we can live forever (John 17:3); how we can have a joy-filled life (John 10); how we can experience real love (1 Corinthians 13); how we can be prosperous no matter what the economic, social, or political climate (Joshua 1:8–9); and how we never need fear the future (John 14).

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord, I pray that by Your grace and for Your glory, You will help every one of us to have an ear to hear Your message. I pray that we would look at this Book differently. The world around us is waiting for some alien intelligence to tell them what to do. But we have You, the Creator of the universe, who has already told us what to do, and we want to obey You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: God Speaks through His Word

*"You search **the Scriptures**, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which **testify of Me**" (John 5:39, emphasis added).*

The Bible is like many textbooks in school: all the answers are found at the end of the book. The end of the Bible is, of course, The Revelation of Jesus Christ that John recorded for us.

The Bible is comprised of sixty-six books, written by forty authors over fifteen centuries, yet it possesses a supernaturally engineered message. The guiding hand of God, through the Holy Spirit inspiring each human author, placed every word, letter, name, place, and number there. Thus every detail of God's Word was orchestrated by God to reveal Himself and His plan.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Revelation. Its 404 verses, which hold allusions to over 800 Old Testament verses and passages, tie the entire Bible together in a grand finale. In fact, if you understand the Old Testament, you will understand Revelation.

Jesus wrote messages to the seven churches that we all need to hear. There were many other churches at that time which would seem to be more historically significant than the seven that Jesus addressed, such as the churches at Jerusalem, Rome, Galatia, Corinth, Antioch, Colossae,

Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Miletus. So why did Jesus select just these seven: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea? The reason is that they represent all of us today. Seven is always God's "number of completion." He picked seven local, individual congregations to write to, using some very interesting words. His message was not only to them there and then but also to us here and now. Jesus actually gives us at least a four-level message in each of these letters.

Jesus gives a specific message: *"to ... the church in ..."* (Revelation 2:1 NASB). He spoke to the local churches that were in those geographic places then. Jesus is likewise interested in today's churches. God's Word speaks to individuals in the twenty-first century because God knows what they are doing at church, at work, and at home. He knows what is going on in private and public lives. He says, "I know what your church is doing; I know where you are headed." When we offer worship to God, if it is cold, it is because we came in cold; if it is fervent, it is because we came in fervent.

Jesus gives a universal message: *"Hear what the Spirit says to the churches ..."* (2:7). This is plural and speaks of an admonition to all churches throughout all the history of the church. Here Jesus addresses His divine expectation that He wants our devotion to Him.

Jesus gives a prophetic message: This is perhaps the most fascinating part of Revelation, as Jesus describes, with divine precision, the seven successive eras the church would pass through from Pentecost to the last days of apostasy. Jesus was also describing the seven types of Christians who would make up the visible church throughout the church age.

Jesus gives a spiritual message: *"He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (2:7). To Him, the one with the "ear" is the individual "who overcomes." This is the most valuable part of these letters. Jesus goes from speaking to the local church to all the local churches throughout the ages, and then He zeros in on the individual. At the tail end of all seven of these letters is the greatest set of promises in the Bible. Because it is a spiritual message, the most valuable part of this book is probably to singular-eared individuals who listen to these practical, personal messages and respond in faith and obedience to the Lord—and actually live the lives Jesus calls them to live.

Jesus' seven letters describe the unfolding of all subsequent church history. In any other order, this prophetic panorama would not be true. Just as the book of Acts covers about thirty years of the growth and ministry of the church, the second and third chapters of Revelation cover the next 1,900 years, and seem to be the explanation for the interval between the sixty-ninth and seventieth "weeks" of Daniel 9. (For a full explanation of Daniel's seventy weeks, see Week 31: "Remember the Plan of the Ages.")

I pray that you are among the singular-eared individuals who will listen to Christ's practical, personal messages and respond in faith and obedience to the Lord by actually *living* the life Jesus calls you to live!

TUESDAY: God Speaks to Us

*“He who has an ear, let him **hear what the Spirit says to the churches.** To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7, emphasis added).*

THE SPECIFIC MESSAGE—Christ is speaking to His church. Each letter to the churches has all or part of these seven components:

1. Jesus addresses each **assembly**: *“To the angel of the church in ...”* (2:1a NASB).
2. Jesus also addresses specific **individuals**. Jesus knows all about the problems of the local church—He is not out of touch.
3. Jesus addresses each church with **authority**: *“[He] walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”* (2:1b).
4. Jesus addresses each church with an **approval**: *“I know your works, your labor ...”* (2:2–3).
5. Jesus addresses each church with an **admonition**: *“I have this against you ...”* (2:4).
6. Jesus addresses each church with an **appeal**: *“... Repent and do the first works ...”* (2:5).
7. Jesus addresses each church with an **assurance**: *“To him who overcomes ...”* (2:7).

Jesus knows what is going on in both your local assembly and your life. This is His message to each of His local churches!

THE UNIVERSAL MESSAGE—Christ is waiting for His church. To all churches throughout history Jesus says, “I always expect your *devotion* to me!” That is *phenomenal*!

The seven churches in every age represent seven varieties of Christians—true *and* false. Everyone who professes Christianity is like one or more of these seven.

The Church at Ephesus: These Christians had a great start but left their first love, their all-consuming passion for Christ. Jesus told them, “You started out so well—you could not get enough of My Word; you could not get enough of fellowshiping with My people; you could not get enough of worshiping Me; and you could not get enough of doing everything for Me!”

That is Christ’s universal message throughout the church age: some will start great, but sooner or later their devotion will wane. So Jesus says, “Listen to what I have to say, for I am all

you need! Be an overcomer and come back to Me!" Overcomers know that Jesus is all they need, so they will repent and return to their first love!

The Church at Smyrna: The Smyranean Christians stood fast during great persecution. No matter what the devil threw at them, they became even more purified. Christ's universal message to the churches is this: saints should expect to suffer and, as a result, be purified. Are you suffering in your family? Are you suffering through spiritual warfare in your private communion with the Lord? Are you suffering at your job or at school? Wherever you are suffering, Jesus says, "I know that you are being purified by persecution. Be faithful!" Overcomers know that Jesus is all they need, so they will remain faithful to Him at all costs.

The Church at Pergamos: These Pergamite Christians were drowning in worldliness. Some were wed to the world like "country club Christians" with no standards. Do you have a focus and grip on your money, your car, and your job? Have you decided that you will do what is socially acceptable—even if it compromises Scripture's absolutes? Are you more concerned with fashion than with holiness? In every church there are "country club Christians." There are always those who try to reconcile Christ to the world. They try to make Him palatable so that no one is offended. Overcomers know that Jesus is all they need, so they will resist worldliness and keep their eyes on the Lord.

The Church at Thyatira: The false teacher, Jezebel, seduced the Thyatiran Christians. Some believed her and started following a false doctrine, which had a social gospel rather than a divine call to the new birth. They thought that God just wanted to clean up the *world*, but not the individual. To them, the gospel was a call to society, and not the sinner. Overcomers know that Jesus is all they need, so they will resist all such evil teaching and lifestyles.

The Church at Sardis: These Christians had a big name, but no life. Throughout the centuries, the persecuted in Christ's church have sat right next to the cold and lifeless. Jesus said that His message universally goes to all; He calls us where we are, and asks us to come to Him! Sardian Christians are as dead as last week's cut flowers—cold and lifeless—in a spiritual stupor. Overcomers know that Jesus is all they need, so they will not defile themselves with the "corpses."

The Church at Philadelphia: Jesus gave these believers no condemnation or blame. Philadelphian Christians of today are sound in doctrine and zealous in ministry, and are reaching out to the world with their deep love for the Lord Jesus Christ! Overcomers know that Jesus is all they need, so their heart beats for Christ alone.

The Church at Laodicea: These individuals are apostate, counterfeit, and sickening to Christ—members of the Christless church that will thrive in the Tribulation under Satan's leadership. They are part of the visible church in name only. Jesus therefore told them that He would spit them out of His mouth!

This is Jesus' universal message: the whole church is comprised of these seven types of Christians—there are some of each in every age. So, in a most emphatic way, if you are a born-again Christian, this letter is addressed to you. If you are among the persecuted, remain faithful!

But if you have left your first love, *remember* what Jesus did for you. *Repent! Repeat* those things you did at first for Christ! Go back to Him with your whole heart!

WEDNESDAY: God Speaks about the Future

*“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times **things that are not yet done**, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure ...’” (Isaiah 46:10, emphasis added).*

THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE—Christ is being faded away by His church. The church throughout the ages has gone through seven successive stages. There are seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3 that show us the church from God’s prophetic perspective. The seven churches represent seven phases or periods in church history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ. Each has a characteristic that is set forth within the letter and, interestingly enough, within the name of the church. Each name of these churches represents the age in which they lived.

The Ephesian Period (A.D. 30–60): This apostolic era was a time of warmth, love, and labor for Christ. However, defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others, and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and church offices. The church mushroomed and grew rampantly through the Roman Empire. But as it grew, it gradually cooled.

The Smyranean Period (A.D. 60–313): This was a time of martyrdom. It was a sweet savor to God when His children showed “faithfulness unto death,” but this period was also marked with further developments of defection through the establishment of castes and orders, the license of Judaizing inclinations, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the gospel. However, the church was purified in this era because of the persecution. History records that in Bythnia, in Asia Minor, the Roman governor marched all the inhabitants of one city out to a cliff. He ordered them to deny Christ and say “Caesar is lord,” or the soldiers would throw them off the cliff. Ten thousand were executed in that manner.

The Pergamite Period (A.D. 313–500): True faith more and more disappeared from view. Clericalism gradually formed itself into a system: the church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft. When Constantine legalized Christianity in A.D. 313, he put a whole group of pagan priests into the church. Robes, beads, candles, headdresses, mass, and purgatory came from paganism *into* the church—*not* from the Bible. This was the time the church became wed to the world.

The Thyatiran Period (A.D. 500–1500): This was the era of Romanism with its purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood and darkness of truth. It was the age of clerical domination in which the church usurped the place of Christ, but His witnesses were given dungeons, stakes, and inquisitions. It was the age of the enthronement of the false prophetess, Mother Mary, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation.

The Sardian Period (A.D. 1500–1800): This period represents the separation and return of Christ's rule. There were many great revivals and many worthy names, but this time was still marked with deadness overall, and having great need of repentance. This was an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant, which was centuries before the great evangelical movements began.

The Philadelphian Period (A.D. 1800–1948): During this time, there was great missionary fervor, evangelistic outreach, and devotional godliness. The world was penetrated with the gospel during these years like no time since Pentecost. The British Empire was worldwide, and its monarchy wanted Christ exalted!

The Laodicean Period (A.D. 1948—): This speaks of the time from 1948 until the end of the age. Why 1948? Because the steps to globalism were started that year more than any other year in history. What steps? The birth of the United Nations (so we can have Revelation 13), the birth of the World Council of Churches (so we can have Revelation 17), the birth of the computer/transistor (so we can have Revelation 18), and the rebirth of the State of Israel (so we can have Revelation 12–19). In our western culture, churches are full of lukewarmness, self-sufficiency, empty professions, and false peace. Judgment day will reveal the unthinking multitudes who have supposed that they were Christians, but were not.²

Jesus maps out the course of history for the church, and He says, "I am in every age!" I wonder: have you been able to discern which church period most describes your own life at the moment?

THURSDAY: God Tells Us His Plan

*You will show me **the path of life**; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are **pleasures forevermore*** (Psalm 16:11, emphasis added).

THE SPIRITUAL MESSAGE—Christ is seeking out His church. The last message Jesus has for us is His wonderful plan! He has spelled out what He wants us to be like, and He has detailed how He, by His grace, will enable us to live such a wonderful life!

Christ offers an abundant life: *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God"* (Revelation 2:7). This means that true believers have abundant lives in paradise regained. Jesus described what we have in Him as an overflowing life: *"He who believes in Me, ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:38).

There is no life like Christ's in us! It is an extraordinary life: He came *"... that [we] may have life, and that [we] may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). The word "abundant," *perissos*, means "over and above, more than is necessary, exceeding abundantly, supremely."

This is what grips the world. This is why, when you are going through a prophetic study, you must come to terms with this question: If you lost all your physical assets—real estate, stocks, bonds and retirement accounts—what would you have left? Your *real* treasure—Jesus Christ!

Think about it: while your things still have value, give them to the Lord instead of regretting it later when their value is gone. God says, “What you keep you lose, but what you give lasts forever!”

Christ offers an indestructible life: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death”* (Revelation 2:11).

There are two very powerful truths that assure us. Jesus promised that we will be secure from any physical adversary: *“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish 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”* (John 10:28–29).

Paul reminds us that we are also secure from any spiritual adversary: ... *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).

Christ offers an inexhaustible supply: *“... To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it”* (Revelation 2:17).

Jesus promises that all our spiritual needs will be met: ... *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and He who believes in Me shall never thirst”* (John 6:35).

Non-Christians look at us and, on the surface, they may see only our suffering. Yet a Christian, even one in the hospital suffering from cancer or another deadly disease, can still encourage fellow believers when they visit or phone the patient. This is God’s inexhaustible supply!

Jesus also assures us that all our spiritual desires, those prompted by the Holy Spirit, will be fulfilled: *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it”* (John 14:13–14 NIV). Wherever you are—hospital bed, retirement home, on the job, or on the road—you can have His *inexhaustible supply* and, through prayer, see God acting to take His glorious power to the ends of the earth. The checkbook of faith is backed by an *inexhaustible* account. All the power of the Godhead is operational by faith through our prayers.

Christ offers an inexpressible future: *“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations”* (Revelation 2:26). God will reward us with immeasurable treasures: *“... There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—... and in the age to come, eternal life”* (Mark 10:29–30).

As you follow Jesus, you should be willing to leave all behind for the sake of the gospel. If you do, God will one day overwhelm you with unbelievable pleasures! The apostle Paul, after he had been *“caught up into Paradise,”* would have excitedly shared what he saw and heard, but he was not permitted to do so. For God said that it was *“not lawful for a man to utter”* (2 Corinthians 12:4). But this we do know: Paul experienced a remarkable foretaste of what Christ has in store for those who love Him! Are you excited about all that He has planned for you?

FRIDAY: Christ Speaks Your Name

*“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and ... **I will confess his name** before My Father, and before His angels” (Revelation 3:5, emphasis added).*

Christ has something far better than insurance coverage: He has promised that He will never forget us, and will someday confess our name before His Father in heaven. Could there be anything greater than that?

Many would like to be related to wealthy people because they hope to inherit a fortune some day. But we have something far more precious—Christ as our garment, our Advocate, and our relative.

- **Christ is our garment:** *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts* (Romans 13:14).
- **Christ is our Advocate:** *... He ... has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is ... able to save to the uttermost ..., since He always lives to make intercession for [us]* (Hebrews 7:24–25).
- **Christ is our Relative:** *And if children, then ... joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together* (Romans 8:17).

True believers have an inescapable destination: *“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name”* (Revelation 3:12).

We are a pillar because we are secure: *“Let not your heart be troubled In My Father’s house are many mansions I go to prepare a place for you. And ... will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:1–3).

We have a new name because we are a love gift from the Father to the Son: *“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory ...”* (John 17:24).

In light of all He’s done, and is doing for you, what have you done for Jesus?

SATURDAY: God Wants to Talk to You

*“Oh, that you had **heeded My commandments!** Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea”* (Isaiah 48:18, emphasis added).

We commonly struggle daily: we get up in the morning, bleary and tired, and we read our Bibles. We then try to read again when our minds are clearer. Then at night we remind ourselves to study and pray. There are many distractions that come and go, and we have to focus our minds

on so many things. We struggle with the flesh, spiritual warfare, and all the disappointments of life. But God promises *intimacy* to those who will rise above their distractions in life and truly seek Him: “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him*” (John 14:21).

- **Intimacy is a Person:** “*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (John 17:3).
- **Intimacy is permanent:** “*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son*” (Revelation 21:7).

Make a choice to live in hope. In every one of Christ’s letters to the churches, He says, “*he who has an ear*” Do you have “an ear” to hear Him? Jesus always gives an invitation. Do you hear His voice? Have you received what He offers today?

If you have not yet heeded His call, find hope in Christ by hearing Christ’s message and becoming an overcomer (Revelation 3:20)! Admit that you are lost; open your eyes to behold Jesus in all His beauty; turn from darkness to the Light, and from the power of Satan (Acts 26:18). Then believe that only Christ saves, and receive forgiveness for sin through the saving faith of Christ. And finally, confess Jesus Christ with your mouth (Romans 10:9–10).

If God is speaking to your heart right now about your relationship with Him, bow and thank Him for this message that the world is searching for—the message He has already given to us.

Now reacquaint yourself with the words of this wonderful old song! I encourage you to worship the Lord as you sing it from your heart!

The Church’s One Foundation

*The church’s one foundation Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation, By spirit and the Word:
From heav’n He came and sought her To be His holy bride,
With His own blood He bought her, And for her life He died.*

*Elect from ev’ry nation, Yet one o’er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses, Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses, With ev’ry grace endued.*

*’Mid toil and tribulation, And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation Of peace forevermore;
Till with the vision glorious, Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious Shall be the church at rest.*

—Samuel J. Stone, 1839–1900

Week 14—Remember Christ's Jealousy

(Revelation 2:1–7—The Church at Ephesus)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you remember Christ's jealousy!



SUNDAY: The First-Century Church

*... I write so that you may know **how you ought to conduct yourself** in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth* (1 Timothy 3:15, emphasis added).

Jesus jealously longs for us to love Him supremely—like His faithful saints did in the early church! From the depths of the catacombs, by dim and flickering light, the upturned sea of faces sang praises to the Lamb that was slain. Above ground, just thirty feet over their heads, a chariot clattered along the Roman road heading to the Coliseum. Inside that magnificent structure, nearly 80,000 spectators already strained to get a good view. The preliminary activities of fighting beasts drew only partial approval from the crowd. Soon blood would be seen, and that was what they came to see. Human blood from helpless Christians herded into the red-stained sand always drew rapt attention. As gladiators jabbed the unarmed participants, rounded up from various raids on the fledgling church, hunger-crazed predators circled in their cages awaiting a meal of those being pushed into the pit. Then the trumpet sounded! The crowd roared as defenseless men, women, and children faced the attacking wave of claws, fangs, and roars. Soon it was over. Blood and some bones were all that remained. As the mesmerized crowds departed, they were eagerly anticipating yet another exhibition on the morrow.

The next attraction for the day was in the torch-lit gardens of the Forum. At dusk the emperor would raise tied-and-pitch-covered human torches on wooden poles—Christians being martyred. They suffered greatly as they were burned alive to light the path of the citizens of the persecuting empire!

As night mercifully fell, the worshipers who lived in the catacombs crept up the city storm sewers to risk their lives in search of bones from the arena's blood-soaked sands and body parts from the smoldering stakes. They reverently carried them down into the catacombs and buried them with tear-filled songs of praise to the God of hope and comfort who alone could give them courage to go on. This was life for the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ during the latter part of the first century in the Roman Empire.

What was it that made them behave so bravely in such trying times? They were godly saints who followed the narrow path, the cross of Jesus—"the Way" (John 14:6; Acts 24:14–15). In Acts 19:11–20, Luke described many extraordinary and miraculous events with amazing conversions and life transformations. These saints believed the truth about God. Because they believed rightly, they behaved rightly.

Jesus would love for us to daily affirm that we love Him, and want to serve Him with their same depth of devotion! We thus need to cultivate and embrace the truths that made these early saints so faithful: they were assured that Christ had saved them; they lived each day like they belonged to Him; and they really believed that they were headed to heaven to live forever with Him. Those who embrace these truths will have powerful effects in their lives, and that is what our jealous Lord wants to see in each of us.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord, as we hear Your letter to the church at Ephesus, and listen to Your words to us, I pray that You would help us to have ears to hear. Help us to have spiritual understanding so that Your message might be personal and very practical. We want to love You as at the first all the way to the end. We want to hold You in first place in our lives. We pray that as we look through this letter, and as Your Spirit illumines us, that we will see those keys You have given us to loving You most and first, because You are a jealous God. You long for us to love You and not just to serve You. I pray that such love would be evident in our lives and in our church lest you remove our lampstand, and we are no longer effective for You. We thank You in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

MONDAY: Ephesus in the First Century

*... Paul, having passed through the upper regions, **came to Ephesus**. And **finding some disciples** he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ... They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had **laid hands on them**, the Holy Spirit came upon them Now the men were **about twelve in all** (Acts 19:1–3, 5–7, emphasis added).*

Ephesus was second among the cities of the empire; only Rome exceeded her in wealth and power. If you were arriving in Ephesus, the center of Greek mythological worship, there was only

one sight that would catch your eyes. It would not be the bustling harbor teeming with boats; nor the roads lined with the exotic spices and goods from the East. It would be the lustrous golden gleam of the Seventh Wonder of the Ancient World: the Temple of Diana (Artemis to the Greeks). It was the largest building of that period—four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens—the size of a city block, ten stories high, and covered with gold. Cities that wanted to be “rained on” with prosperity sent a gold-covered column for this temple.

Gross immorality existed in Ephesus due to the Temple of Diana's presence. All day long, in the confines of this magnificent golden palace, thousands of male and female prostitutes gave themselves in the sordid worship of the pagan fertility deities. At dusk, they would then go into the city to earn a living in the bustling atmosphere of travelers from both land and sea.

In the midst of all this debauchery, Jesus Christ had a church planted at Ephesus, one that was well-pleasing to God. In fact, they were honored by receiving the first of Christ's personal letters to His seven churches (Revelation 2:1–7). The church at Ephesus was the most important church in the de facto capital, the landing-place for a messenger from Patmos, and at the head of a circular road joining the seven cities in order.

Here is the best part of that city: Jesus was shining through the saints at Ephesus! The church at Ephesus was a vibrant church. Jesus Christ was preeminent: *... Fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified* (Acts 19:17). It wasn't the denomination, the buildings, or the leaders that drew the attention of these saints—it was the presence of the Lord!

The Ephesian church was repentant: *... Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them ...* (Acts 19:18–19). The Ephesian Christians made public renunciation of their old lives because God's Word was prominent in their church: *So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed* (Acts 19:20).

The Ephesian saints were heirs to the greatest and longest days of Paul's earthly ministry—his three years at Ephesus (Acts 20:31). Having been privileged to see Paul in his finest hours of ministry, they became a dynamic church that was pleasing to the Lord.

You, too, can please God by making Christ and His Word pre-eminent, and thereby renouncing your old life. To grow in the Lord, ask Him to give you spiritual understanding so that His message to the church at Ephesus might become personal and practical. And, above all, pray that He will empower you to love Him as much at the end of your life as you did when you were first saved!

TUESDAY: The Loyalty Christ Seeks

*“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and **you have persevered** and have patience, **and have labored for My name's sake** and have not become weary. ... But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate”* (Revelation 2:2–3, 6, emphasis added).

The Ephesian church was tremendously nurtured by Paul, Timothy, and John. Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy while Timothy was the pastor at Ephesus. Paul had sent him to that church and, as church history records, Timothy stayed until a mob brutally murdered him for his strong preaching against sin. After that, until the apostle John was taken prisoner by the emperor and banished to Patmos, he shepherded that great Ephesian church, which had become the largest in Asia Minor (about 5,000 saints!).

The saints in Ephesus were loyal to Christ's church, and this particular assembly had a tremendous history. Church history also indicates that Mary, the mother of our Lord, moved from Jerusalem with John, and later died there. This city had an honor no other knew: Ephesus was the only church that had two apostles, Paul and John, who wrote them inspired letters—Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians and John's writing down of Christ's personal letter to this assembly.

A generation from its founding, the church and the Ephesian Christians were mature. Two generations from Pentecost, the church at Ephesus had perhaps the richest history of any church in the ancient world. They were loyal to God's standards. Jesus approved their purity in the midst of a wicked culture.

In our own culture, just a generation ago people had to search to find anything that was off-color or pornographic. But today you have to work to *not* find that wickedness. Yet we are not that much different from the society in which the Ephesians lived. Ephesus was a city much like Las Vegas or Atlantic City, and when you entered it, they might as well have had a sign saying: WELCOME TO SIN CITY! What I want you to see is this: their purity in the midst of a wicked culture is the *reason* Jesus approved of the Ephesian church.

It is also notable that the saints at Ephesus were not followers of Nicolas—a deacon (Acts 6) who later became an apostate and led the church astray into immorality and wickedness. Instead, the Ephesians were doing what Christ wanted them to do: they were toiling to exhaustion, pouring themselves into the work for Christ. They refused to even eat with someone who was living in immorality and disobedience. When things got tough, they did not let go of Christ, they kept going. They had patience even in persecution, and there was plenty of it!

How can gross immorality, such as existed at Ephesus, be overcome? The Ephesian Christians learned how to be overcomers through Paul's letter to them forty years earlier. Let's look at the principles he taught so that we can apply them to our own lives.

Repent of your past: ... *We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks* (Ephesians 2:3; 5:3–4).

Having renounced all connection with their old ways (Ephesians 5:12), they would not even talk about them, or remind others of what they used to do. (That principle is something to bear in mind when giving a “before and after” testimony of salvation.) A simple application is this: do not let your mouth go back to the old ways of telling or laughing at off-color stories, double meanings, or the innuendo. Do not quote the TV shows. Instead, use your mouth to give thanks to God. Have you fully renounced your old ways and repented of your past?

Learn that your calling is different: ... *We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10). Have you truly comprehended what a special calling God has given to you?

Learn the spiritual secret of putting off and putting on: ... *Put off ... your former conduct [lifestyle], ... be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and ... put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness* (Ephesians 4:22–24). In the streets of Ephesus, Christians were exposed daily to carved symbols of various immoral deviations that were to be followed to the place where those lusts could be fulfilled. But they “put off” those lusts by the grace of God. Have you learned their spiritual secret of putting off the old habits and putting on the new in Christ? Are you being renewed by getting God’s Word deep within your heart?

Resist evil influences: ... *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them* (Ephesians 5:11). Because the Temple of Diana was the most revered site in the ancient world to literally millions of worshipers, a custom had arisen that anyone, regardless of their status, was “free” within a 200-yard security zone. Thus, criminals came from far and wide to find a haven, and their presence only permeated the city with evil. Do you resist all evil influences?

Commit to truth and kindness: ... *Putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor” Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you* (Ephesians 4:25, 32). Are you committed to honesty and kindness? Are you willing to humbly forgive—even when ill treated?

Release anger and pride to God: *“Be angry, and do not sin” ... nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor ... that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice* (Ephesians 4:26–31). Have you released your anger and pride to God?

Jesus addresses His people with authority. He says, “I have the message—the eternal gospel. I am the One who holds the message in My right hand, and I walk in the midst of the church; I am examining what you are doing with it. I am looking at how you are living in light of the message you have received.” Are you, like the saints at Ephesus, loyal to God and His Word?

WEDNESDAY: The Love Christ Seeks

*“... I have this against you, that **you have left your first love**”* (Revelation 2:4, emphasis added).

“For over 40 years, since its founding,” writes John MacArthur, “this church had remained faithful to the Word and the Lord. Through difficulty and persecution, the members had endured, always driven by the right motive, i.e., for Christ’s name and reputation. ... But the Ephesian’s passion and fervor for Christ had become cold, mechanical orthodoxy. Their doctrinal and

moral purity, their undiminished zeal for the truth, and their disciplined service were no substitute for the love for Christ they had forsaken.”¹

Jesus therefore gave them an admonition in Revelation 2:4: “You have left (quit or forsaken) your first love.” In other words, it is not *what* you are doing; it is *why* you are doing it. You are not serving in this church for the right reasons, and that is not pleasing to Me. I am pleased that you are saved and living a pure life, but you are not pleasing to Me when you are motivated by yourself and not by pure love for Me.”

When life is only orthodox, routine, smoothly running, and the inner springs of life are running dry, that is not the spiritual life that God intends for you. The abundant life that Jesus offers is one filled with His love that conquers, captures, and crowns every part of your life. It is 1 Corinthians 13 love that can only be described, because it is so impossible to define. John spoke much of love and Christ (twenty-nine times in the synoptic gospels; forty-five times in John; fifty-one times in the epistles). Christ is present with you right now, and waiting for you!

What is first love?

- **First love prompts us to patience**—like the love experienced by Jacob. Laboring and waiting seven years for his bride, Rachel, *seemed only a few days to him* (Genesis 29:20). Yet for some in today’s church, praying for just seven *minutes* seems like an eternity.
- **First love prompts us to worship**—like David’s love that overflowed from the shepherd boy’s heart into worshipful psalms. He never complained about having to sit out in the weather watching the sheep while his seven older brothers got to stay home. Instead, he loved his Savior so much that he saw Him in the mighty power of the wind and thunder, the brooks, the animals, and the stars. David worshiped the Lord wherever he was (Psalm 19).
- **First love prompts us to give our treasures**—like Mary of Bethany who broke the alabaster box of ointment and poured it out for Christ (Matthew 26:7). She could have kept her treasure, but she lavished it on the Lord! A martyred saint, Jim Elliot, once said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”
- **First love prompts us to thanksgiving**—like the woman who wept at Christ’s feet, washed them with her tears, and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7:37). First love loves much, for much has been forgiven.
- **First love prompts us to sit at Jesus’ feet and just love Him**—like Mary of Bethany when she worshiped at Christ’s feet while Martha was “busy about the

house” serving. Martha failed to perceive that her most important priority was to *adore* Christ, not serve Him. (See Luke 10:38–41.)

- **First love prompts us to love His coming**—like Paul who longed for Christ’s return! Yet he faithfully did what Christ wanted him to accomplish (Philippians 1:21–26).
- **First love prompts us to love His Word**—like the Berean Christians demonstrated by their insatiable desire to read and know God’s Word (Acts 17:11). They also understood the importance of having a passion to be with God’s people when they met.

How is your spiritual temperature today? Has your passion for Christ cooled, and are you now laboring without love? Has your spiritual life become so mechanical that the inner springs have run dry? Do you have a love that conquers, captures, and crowns every part of your life? Is your love like that in 1 Corinthians 13 that can only be described because it is so impossible to define? Giving Christ the love and attention He desires is not only possible, but it is also essential if you are to avoid grieving His Holy Spirit!

THURSDAY: The Worship Christ Seeks

*“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and mammon** [material possessions]” (Matthew 6:24, emphasis added).*

The church at Ephesus had been loyal to God and His Word in spite of being surrounded by strong materialism in their city. Because of the nearly universal worship of Diana, no one would dare to rob her; thus, behind the altar was the World Bank. One might say that Ephesus was the New York City of the ancient world. Perhaps the evil influence of this materialistic environment may have gradually weakened the first love of some of the Ephesian Christians. For lusting after money and possessions is certain to cool a believer’s love for Christ.

How did the devoted Christians at Ephesus resist Satan’s stronghold of materialism? As Paul said in Colossians 3, they set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth. As specific biblical principles were followed, they broke free of the lust for money and possessions. These same principles apply to us today as well.

Live for your new inheritance reserved in heaven: *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will* (Ephesians 1:11).

Rejoice in your secure inheritance: *[The Holy Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory* (Ephesians 1:14). God

is safeguarding our inheritance! After the Resurrection, Jesus went back to prepare a place for us. In light of the fact that it took Jesus only six days to make the whole universe, the heavenly mansions He is preparing must be *spectacular* (John 14:2).

Rejoice in your magnificent inheritance: *The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints ...* (Ephesians 1:18). What Christ has in store for us is far greater than we could possibly ever imagine, for His riches are unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8)!

Rejoice that your wealth in Christ is more than can be counted: *... In the ages to come He [will] show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:7). The only way to get victory over the lust of materialism is to rejoice wholeheartedly in Jesus Himself—and the richness of what Christ has in store for you. *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21).

Our greatest treasure is to be *Jesus*—whom we are to worship with our whole heart, mind, and soul. In contrast, the full worship of Diana involved silver “letters” (the images made and sold there), which led to very alluring, sordid, and ecstatic worship. How did the Ephesian Christians keep from getting caught up in such false worship? They saw that their access in Christ was instant and universal through prayer, and not localized to a pagan temple. They understood that true worship is spiritual: *“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24; see also Ephesians 5:18–21). Diana’s temple fell into ruins, but Christ’s church can never be destroyed: *... The whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord ...* (Ephesians 2:21).

Now then, what seems to be the root cause behind the Ephesians’ loss of their first love? Although materialism may have cooled the passion of some for Christ, I believe the root cause is that they stopped worshipping because they were so busy. Regardless of what competes for our affections to rob us of our first love—even service for Christ Himself—we need to repent and return to the way things were at first with the Lord (Revelation 2:5).

Jesus says, “Worship *before* You serve Me! You can’t worship Me ‘in spirit and in truth’ if you have left your first love! And see to it that you maintain your passion to be with My people every time they meet!”

Do you have “an ear to hear” His voice speaking to you? I pray so!

FRIDAY: Beware of Jesus’ Jealousy

*... Do you not know that **friendship with the world is enmity with God?** Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* (James 4:4, emphasis added).

In yesterday’s devotional, we saw that no one can serve two masters. In James, God strongly tells us that Jesus is so jealous of us that He does not want us to have friendship with the world. I am not talking about having friends that are unsaved, but loving the world system. In other

words, Jesus does not want us to get involved in things that make us forget Him. He does not want the world to be on our minds all the time. He does not want us to be willing to sacrifice for it. He does not want the world, and all that is in it, to block Him out.

Before marriage, in order to have a relationship, you must be selective: you cannot have a relationship with just anyone—only one person. You aggressively pursue the one you love, and this is to continue on into marriage. Thus, God is saying, “You are married to Me, so you cannot be out dating anymore.”

Did you know that one of the prime characteristics of God is *jealousy*? We humans believe that jealousy is bad and, from a human standpoint, it indeed can be. But because God is perfect, His jealousy is also perfect. Exodus 20:5 says that ... *you shall not bow down to them nor serve them* [the gods of this world]. *For I ... am a jealous God* (See also Exodus 34:14 and Deuteronomy 4:24.)

God truly wants us to listen to Jesus (Matthew 22:37–38). We should therefore regularly examine our focus by asking these questions: *Who or what is my God? What is the center of my life? What do I rely on?*

Worldliness is not so much a matter of activity, but of attitude. A Christian can stay away from questionable amusements and places and still love the world, for worldliness is a matter of the heart. Worldliness not only affects our response to the love of God, but also affects our response to the will of God: ... *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him* (1 John 2:15; see also 2:17). Doing the will of God is a joy for those living in the love of God (John 15:14), but when a believer loses his or her enjoyment of the Father's love, it will be hard to obey His will. Combining those two factors leads to this practical definition of worldliness: **Worldliness is anything in a Christian's life that causes him to lose his enjoyment of the Father's love or his desire to do the Father's will.**

The extent to which we fail to respond to the Father's love (our personal devotional life), and fail to do the Father's will (our daily conduct), is the degree of worldliness that has entrapped us. Always remember: if we fraternize with the world, we become enemies with God.

At the end of an incredible life, the apostle John wrote some interesting words. He had met and followed Jesus as a very young man. After those climactic days of the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and birth of the church, John had outlived all the apostles. The very last thing that he wrote to us was this warning: *Little children, keep yourselves from idols* (1 John 5:21). We don't have Ashteroths and Baals, but we do have plenty of modern-day idols that God has always condemned.

Our careers, jobs, occupations, or even today's technology can become idols. You might ask, “The Bible talks about that?” Yes, God is vitally interested in all that we fill our brief lives with as we journey heavenward: *They take up all of them with a hook, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their dragnet; because by them their share is sumptuous and their food plentiful* (Habakkuk 1:15–16).

That passage refers to worship of the occupation that brings work, the job that brings the income, the career that brings success, and the technology that brings pleasure. Worship is thinking about something or someone all the time. You shouldn't know the stock market, sports statistics, or the latest hit tune better than you know God's Word. Habakkuk 1:15 says that it is idolatry to sacrifice to our net. The net is just a tool, but we will lose our first love if we start worshipping that tool.

Our appetites and desires can become idols. Some people live to satiate themselves, like the rich fool of Luke 12:19 whose motto was to *"eat, drink, and be merry."* Philippians 3:18–19 says that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Therefore, their destiny is destruction; their god is their stomach (a reference to all physical desires, not just to food); and their glory is in their shame because their mind is on earthly things.

Money can become an idol. The book of Job, written sometime after the Flood, is the oldest book in the Bible. Job said that if he put his security in money (or even nature), instead of the Creator, he could not worship the Most High God: *"If I have ... said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' if I have rejoiced over my great wealth ..., if I have regarded the sun ... or the moon ... so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high"* (Job 31:24–28, NIV).

At the Transfiguration, ... *suddenly a voice came out of the cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* (Matthew 17:5–6, emphasis added). Because God never changes, that command still stands. God the Father, who is a jealous God, expects us to heed whatever His Son says to us, and in James 4:4 Jesus has told us that *"... Whoever ... wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."* Whom do you worship? The modern idols of this world—or God? Remember: no man can serve two masters.

SATURDAY: Christ's Offer of Victory

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place (2 Corinthians 2:14, emphasis added).

Not only did the church at Ephesus struggle with worldliness all around them, but they also had to be on constant alert to strong satanic influence. As Acts 19 records, there were many who used and followed occultist books and their witchcraft powers of Satan—just as is occurring more and more in our age. Maybe your weakness is not immorality or materialism; maybe you are spiritually sensitive and are oppressed by demonic powers. How do you handle that? The letter of Jesus to Ephesus (Revelation 2:1–7) is best understood when you read Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

How did the Ephesian saints resist strong Satanism? They saw that their victory was in Christ. We can learn much from these principles Paul taught about being an overcomer. First, know that **Jesus is above all others:** ... *He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and*

seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church ... (Ephesians 1:20-22).

Next, acknowledge that **Satan was our old master:** ... *You once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience ...* (Ephesians 2:2). That was in the past; Satan and his demons do not have a hold on us anymore. We must destroy the things of the past so that they do not tempt us to fall back into sin.

Resist Satan: **don't let Satan have a foothold.** Ephesians 4:27 tells us to not “*give place to the devil.*” Take a moment to look at the more than a dozen sins that surround that verse. Paul seems to imply that any of those sins left unattended can grow into a beachhead for the world, the flesh, and the devil to get a place to defeat us.

Finally, **don't relax around Satan's cronies:** *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them* (Ephesians 5:11). Do not let Satan expose you to his trash through the pipeline of entertainment: TV, movies, inappropriate material on the Internet, music, the arts, and so forth. Do not let Satan's lusts get into your mind. If you listen to music simply because it is beautiful, but its words are ungodly, then you are allowing Satan to fellowship with you. Reprove him instead; keep a guard on your ear gate, eye gate, and other senses.

Never forget: “*The thief [Satan] does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I [Jesus] have come that [you] may have life, and that [you] may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10)!

Make a choice to live in hope. Jesus jealously longs for you to love Him supremely—like His faithful saints did in the early church. If you have left your *first* love, I exhort you to go back to where you departed. Repent; change your will. Simply tell Jesus: “I know that I have left that fervency, warmth, and longing for You. I'm starting to worship my ‘net’ and get my security in something other than You. Help me to repent, and remember where I came from. Help me to again do those works I did in the beginning for You.”

By His grace, choose to then repeat those things you did at the first, when you were so in love with your Lord. But be aware that when you got away from the Word of God, and stopped fellowshiping with His people, your heart grew cold, and it will seem hard to restore what you once had. However, if you daily get back into the Word and fellowship with the saints, your heart will soon warm up again. So Jesus lovingly says to you: “Come back to Me! I miss you!”

As a worshiper of the true God, you need to come into His presence alone as well as in a group. God wants you to gather together with other believers to magnify Him as His family. Although this will cost you time and resources, He will draw you so close that at times the things of earth will grow strangely dim. As you become very involved in such worship, you will receive joy unspeakable and full of glory!

A wonderful way to conclude this day's devotional is to make the beautiful words of this old song a prayer of your heart.

Fairest Lord Jesus

*Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son;
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou my soul's glory, joy, and crown.*

*Fair are the meadows, Fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring;
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.*

*Fair is the sunshine, Fairer still the moonlight
And all the twinkling, starry host;
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer
Than all the angels heavn' can boast.*

*Beautiful Savior, Lord of all nations,
Son of God and Son of man!
Glory and honor, Praise, adoration,
Now and forevermore be Thine!*

—Anonymous German Hymn

Week 15—Experience Christ's Comfort

(Revelation 2:8–11—The Church at Smyrna)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope
as you experience Christ's comfort!



SUNDAY: Be Ready to Listen

*“He who has an ear, let him **hear what the Spirit says to the churches**. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:11).*

In our journey through the Book of Books we have seen Jesus in so many wondrous ways! For instance, we’ve seen that Jesus has a voice *as the sound of many waters* (Revelation 1:15). But did you know that He also speaks in a *still small voice* (1 Kings 19:12b)? Have you heard Him as He has spoken from the pages of His Book? Through His Word, He speaks to all who have the spiritual ears to hear Him. Are your ears tuned in to Jesus?

Last week we saw that the Ephesian period, dating directly from the apostles (A.D. 30-60), was a time of warmth and love and labor for Christ. In Ephesus the true believers had an abundant life (Revelation 2:7), an overflowing life (John 7:38), and an extraordinary life (John 10:10). Defection, however, began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others, and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and church offices.

This week we will now study the second period of church history, the Smyrna period (A.D. 60-303). These saints lived during an era of martyrdom, which kept them basically pure due to the persecution they suffered. As true believers they had an indestructible life (Revelation 2:11).

The saints in Smyrna were faithful unto death, which was a sweet savor unto God. Unless Christ returns soon, we all must face the inevitability of our own death. We can learn how to die in a godly manner from these models: Jacob died trusting the promises of God (Genesis 47:29); Joseph died pointing to the faithfulness of God (Genesis 50:24); David died exhorting his family to follow

God (1 Kings 2:1–4); Stephen died praising God (Acts 7:59–60); Peter died reminding the saints about the Word of God (2 Peter 1:12–15); Paul died finishing the plan of God (2 Timothy 4:6–8); and our Lord Jesus Christ died pointing the way for another to come to God (Luke 23:43).

Have you planned for the spiritual aspects of your death? So many only get the funeral arrangements and their life insurance in order, yet there is so much more to plan and prepare for as a Christian. Are you ready to honor Him in life as well as in death? Are you hoping in Jesus?

My Prayer for You This Week: *We bow before You, Lord Jesus, our Savior. We want to discover the hope that You offer. The only thing that your children actually possess is our hope of everlasting life. Everything else can be stripped away from us—our possessions, all the prizes we have won in life, even those dearest to us. Oh Jesus, what we really possess is our hope in You! Open our eyes and hearts as You speak to us through this special letter that You wrote to the church at Smyrna. Help us to embrace You as the hope to which we cling, the hope toward which we press, and the hope which can never be taken away from us. And then, with that precious and very blessed hope in mind, help us to face the inevitability of our own death in a way that will glorify You. For we recognize that unless You come for us in the Rapture, we will all die. Oh, how we hope for Your return—come quickly, Lord Jesus! In Jesus’ precious name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Be Ready to Trust Christ

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10, emphasis added).

“Smyrna” is a very interesting word because it is derived from the Greek word *smurna* that is translated “myrrh.” Myrrh is an aromatic resin taken from a thorny tree, and was the chief product of this city, the seaport of Myrrh. It was taken by hacking the tree with a machete. Wherever the tree was cut, it would exude the resin. The more it was cut the more this very expensive resin would flow out. Myrrh thus became associated with suffering because this beautiful tree would be attacked and cut and scarred.

In this town where myrrh was gathered, we think of the church that was going to face the cutting edge of persecution. In fact, Jesus essentially told them, “Some of you who receive My letter are going to be put into jail. Some of you are going to be persecuted. Some of you are going to die.” Each one of these declarations was like a cut on the tree of the church there.

Today’s true church is not exempt from persecution either, because Christ has said that all who live godly will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). The more we are cut, the more we are persecuted, and the more we are facing hard times, the more Christ wants the sweet-smelling fragrance of faithfulness to exude out of our lives.

What happens when we get tested? A friend of mine says that all of us are spiritual teabags: when we get dunked up and down in hot water, whatever is inside of us comes out. This past

week, if things got hot, tense, tight, and hard, what came out of your life? Was it the aroma of Christlike myrrh? Or was it something less than that?

This Smyrnan church, which represents the suffering period of church history, had a sweet-smelling fragrance unto the Lord. As we just saw, the name “Smyrna” was derived from a Greek word translated “myrrh.” Myrrh was always associated with the sufferings of Jesus’ life. At Christ’s birth, the Magi gave gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus, who was crushed for our sins. We see a notable example of that in Mark 15:23. While Christ hung on the cross He was offered a sponge filled with wine mixed with myrrh. Because myrrh also served as an anesthetic, His crucifiers were trying to dull His senses to lessen the intense pain He was experiencing. Jesus refused it, however, because He wanted to have full sensation of the pain He suffered for us.

Suffering is an opportunity to choose whether we believe that serving Christ is far better than anything we could ever have. Are you willing to suffer for Christ? Paul said, *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18). If we suffer with Christ, we will also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17b).

TUESDAY: Be Ready to Suffer

... All who desire to **live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution** (2 Timothy 3:12, emphasis added).

Jesus wrote a letter through the apostle John who was exiled on the Isle of Patmos, just a short distance from Ephesus. He wrote the seven letters Jesus dictated to him, and then sent them by boat to Ephesus where there was a world-renowned library and book distribution center. Those letters were copied down and distributed around the postal route (the geographical circle of the locations of the seven churches). Smyrna was the first city, about forty miles from Ephesus. Can you imagine their reaction when they read Jesus’ letter telling them that someone was coming to kill them? That would have been quite a shock!

How did Smyrna get under such a wave of persecution? The problem of that day was called “Emperor Worship.” In A.D. 26, during the life of Jesus Christ, an altar was built to Emperor Tiberius. He was on the throne of the Roman Empire that controlled the entire western world at that time. In the center of Smyrna a temple to Tiberius was built. On it was an inscription that said: “This is dedicated to the glorious Emperor God Tiberius.”

To remain an accepted part of the Empire, each person had to declare his or her loyalty to the emperor by visiting the temple, scooping a pinch of incense, and putting it on the fire. Afterward, a certificate was given to certify that you passed. That was the one act that unified the masses of people in the Roman Empire. However, most Christians would not do this because it required them to say, “Caesar is Lord.” This ritual was not enforced upon Christians until A.D. 94, when the letter to the church at Smyrna was written.

Meet the villains. The first was just three years old when his father died. It was little loss to the boy, for his father had been a killer, a bully, and a cheat. His mother took over the family

trade and continued the boy's education. She murdered his stepfather with a dish of poisoned mushrooms. Reared in squalor, the son was molded into his parents' image. While still young, he committed his first murder—a teenaged boy who stood in his way; with callous indifference, he watched him die. He married at fifteen, had his wife killed, married again, and slew her also. To marry a third time, he murdered the husband of the woman he wanted. Because his mother annoyed him, he arranged her murder as well—at first by guile, but when that was unsuccessful, without pretense. He was an ugly man with a bull neck, beetle brows, a flat nose, and a tough mouth. He had a potbelly, spindly legs, bad skin, and an offensive odor. At age thirty-one he was sentenced to death by flogging. He fled to a dingy basement, and cut his own throat while in the house of a slave. He gave the infant church its first taste of things to come. Who was he? His name was Nero. He was the first of the persecuting Caesars of Rome.

Nero's successor, Domitian, was on the throne thirty years later. It was A.D. 94 when he said, "If you will not take that incense and throw it on the fire, in honor of me as god, then you will be killed because all the Empire will worship me!" When Domitian commanded even the Christians to confess "Caesar is Lord," or pay the price of death, Jesus wrote them the letter recorded in Revelation 2:8–11.

The church at Smyrna was about to face the ultimate test of their lives: "*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve*" (Matthew 4:10b). The choice before them was this: Deny Christ, and live; worship Christ—and die! If you were to face that edict today, do you know how you would respond?

WEDNESDAY: Be Ready to Die

... *I [Paul] am already being poured out as a drink offering, and **the time of my departure is at hand*** (2 Timothy 4:6, emphasis added).

The church at Smyrna had one of the more famous people in history at this time. He knew that the most important decision you will ever make in life is how you want to die. Under his leadership, the saints at Smyrna made a choice that they wanted to die in Jesus.

During the persecutions that followed Christ's letter, Polycarp, the last living person led to Christ by the apostle John, was martyred. "Because he preached Jesus Christ, whom the Jews had crucified, he offended the Jews in Smyrna who were blaspheming and persecuting the Christians. In Revelation 2:9, Jesus referred to these Jews as being "*a synagogue of Satan*." That is not mere speculation because history has left us with an account of the death of Polycarp, the pastor of the church in Smyrna."¹ The account follows:

It was the time of the public games; the city was crowded; and the Jews excited the crowds and suddenly the shout went up throughout the Jewish community: "Away with the atheist; let Polycarp be searched for." They came to arrest him and not even the police captain wished to see Polycarp die. On the brief journey to the city he pled

with the old man: What harm is it to say, “Caesar is Lord” and to offer sacrifice to be saved? But Polycarp was adamant that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord. When he entered the arena ... [the] proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar or death. Polycarp said, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” So the crowds came flocking with burning faggots from the workshops and from the baths, and the Jews, even though they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were foremost in bringing wood for the fire. They were going to bind him to the stake. “Leave me as I am,” he said, “for He who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails.” So they left him loosely bound in the flames.” Think about watching your pastor being burned at the stake.

Polycarp dying for Christ was just one incident in the life of the suffering Smyranean church.²

Hope in Jesus when life is painful. The message Christ gave in Revelation 2:10 is simple: *“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

It is interesting the way this is written: “Either be faithful when you are killed for your faith, or remain faithful all the way until death comes. But don’t fear; be faithful and I will crown you!”

Every word of Christ’s brief letter to the church at Smyrna was so vital to those saints, but because of the urgency of the times there was an economy of words. It was the shortest of the seven letters to the churches, having only four verses and 127 words compared to the twelve verses written to Thyatira.

Because all the letters to the churches tie together with this description of Christ, look at what Jesus said to John earlier: ... *“Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death”* (Revelation 1:17–18).

Now look at Revelation 2:8: *“These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life”* Do you see how Jesus identifies Himself as the author? He says that He identifies with them as they go through this persecution unto death!

Jesus thus reveals Himself to them as the One who is best suited to comfort them in their sorrow and to encourage them in their sufferings: *“[I] was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore”* He consoled them by reminding them that He also had passed through suffering and death, and triumphed over it.

Do you see why Jesus is the author of eternal life? He is the One who was dead, who died in our place ... *that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil ...* (Hebrews 2:14). Throughout human history the power of death has gripped people with fear. Jesus destroyed the devil to ... *release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage* (Hebrews 2:15). Jesus gave us hope!

After Jesus wrote to Smyrna, He identified Himself as the Lord of life who conquered death. Now He gave them an approval: *“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”* (Revelation 2:9).

The martyred Christians were able to die faithfully because they lived faithfully for Christ. They were triumphant in death because they were triumphant in life. And He says to us likewise: “Be faithful unto death, and I will approve of you!”

THURSDAY: Be Ready for Troubles

“You will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10c, emphasis added).

Look out saints at Smyrna—trouble is coming! Christ’s warning to them is interesting. It could be that they had persecution for ten calendar days. Or it could refer to ten periods of time, or that there were ten Roman emperors who persecuted the church. Personally, I believe that all three apply.

The early church did indeed have ten great persecutions under the Roman emperors. It all began with Nero and ended with Diocletian, whose ten-year-long persecution was probably the most terrible of all. Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Severus, Maximum, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian were the ten principal pagan persecutors. However, there was constant, though not always general, trouble until Constantine’s edict of toleration in A.D. 313.

To the Smyranean church, and His children in every church age, Jesus exhorted: “Be faithful!” Why? Because Christ is the One who will award the prized crowns. The faithful will be specially crowned if they are saved by grace and are triumphant in life. Here are the five prized crowns that Christ will present to His faithful ones:

1. **The crown of righteousness** is reserved for the victorious warriors who said no to sin throughout their lives. (2 Timothy 4:8)
2. **The unfading crown** is reserved for the steadfast racers who disciplined their body for Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:25–27)
3. **The crown of life** is reserved for those who were faithful unto death. (Revelation 2:10; James 1:12)
4. **The crown of honor** is reserved for those who were unselfish soul winners in life. (1 Thessalonians 2:9; cf. 3–6; Philippians 4:1)

5. The crown of glory is reserved for those who were examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3–4)

G. C. Morgan has noted that “faithful” means “be convinced.” In Revelation 1:5 Christ refers to Himself as *“the faithful witness.”* Because He is always so faithful, His children are convinced they must rest in Him, and depend on what He says. So “be convinced” of Him, and He will be your constant strength and courage!

FRIDAY: Seven Godly Ways to Die

*These all **died in faith**, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* (Hebrews 11:13, emphasis added).

This week we have been learning about the church at Smyrna—the saints who experienced martyrdom for Christ’s sake. Their faithfulness unto death was such a sweet-smelling savor unto God. Unless Christ returns soon, all of us face the inevitability of death. Are you ready? Have you planned for the testimony you’d like your funeral to be?

By a few simple preparations, you can really bless your family and friends who stay behind after you’ve gone home to be with Jesus. If you have never done this, I encourage you to take out a sheet of paper and label it: “My Home Going Celebration.” Write out a brief description of how you came to Christ, and of your hope in His salvation. Then share some of your favorite verses, songs, and hymns—and even a word to bless those you leave behind. Do this and, like Abel, you will “speak” even after you’ve died (Hebrews 11:4). To further prepare, consider once more the seven godly examples in Scripture of how to die with grace.

Jacob looked for the Land of Promise to the end of his life. When he was close to death, Jacob called Joseph to his side and said, *“Now if I have found favor in your sight, ... deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers ...”* (Genesis 47:29–30). When Jacob was a young man, God had promised that his people would someday have a Land of Promise, but Egypt was not that land. Jacob therefore asked to be laid to rest in the actual land God was giving to his descendants. He had followed his Shepherd all the way, and trusted his Redeemer to save him from his sins (Genesis 48:15–16). Have you thanked the Lord lately for His grace that is greater than all your sins?

Joseph died pointing to the faithfulness of God. He told his brethren, ... *“I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob”* (Genesis 50:24). In the ancient world, when someone was failing in health and was coming to the end of life, the family would gather around and listen to their last words. Inheritances were then divided up. Joseph died pointing his family to the Lord’s promises: “God will surely come to your aid, for He is faithful and will do what He said.”

David died exhorting his family to follow God. When he was about to die, David charged Solomon his son saying: *“I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go”* (1 Kings 2:2–3 NIV). David earned the right to exhort his family spiritually because he had lived a godly life. Lot, however, did not. His family laughed and mocked him, saying that he was scoffing (Genesis 19:14). To make our last moments on earth really count, it is so important that we get ready to die by *first* living for Christ.

Stephen died praising God. While he was being stoned, he prayed, ... *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep* (Acts 7:59–60 NIV). What an incredible testimony of dying faith! Stephen was radiant, worshiping, and offering his spirit into the presence of the Lord!

Peter died reminding the saints about the Word of God. He said, *“I will always remind you of these things, even though you ... are firmly established in the truth you now have. ... It is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside ...* (2 Peter 1:12–14 NIV). Jesus had told Peter that some day his hands would be stretched out, and he would be crucified (John 21:18). History tells us that he was crucified upside down because Peter had declared that he was not worthy to die like Jesus did.

Paul died finishing the plan laid out for Him by God. When death was near, he said, ... *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... will award to me on that day—and ... to all who have longed for his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:6–8 NIV). Paul faithfully followed the course that God had laid out for him. His last days were spent in the maximum security Mamertine Prison in Rome. He did not protest or try to get out; he placidly sat there and wrote letters, knowing that he had faithfully completed what God asked him to do, and was prepared to go to heaven.

Christ died pointing the way for another to come to God. Jesus told one of the criminals being crucified, *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43). Is Jesus *your* hope? If you died today, would you be with Him in paradise? Are you ready to die?

I frequently hear people regretfully say, “I wish I could do that over.” In Philippians 3:13–14, Paul said to forget what is behind and live for the Lord from today on. If you have not been as faithful as you need to be, start *now*. Finish the course Christ has laid out for you, and you will experience a great calm as you follow God’s will daily. This is the very best approach to being ready to go “home” any day—and not just when your “to do” list is complete. Consistently living like this is a wonderful way to die!

SATURDAY: Be Looking Forward to Heaven

*It is **appointed** ... to die once, but after this the judgment* (Hebrews 9:27, emphasis added).

None of us knows the exact date of our appointment with Jesus Christ to take us home to heaven, but we do know that what lies ahead is far superior to anything we could ever envision. Even now Jesus is preparing a mansion for us so that we can be with Him (John 14:2). What will it be like there?

Heaven will be a joyous and satisfying place! The joy of heaven's inhabitants is pictured by the scenes of praise in the book of Revelation, the white-robed conquerors waving palm branches (Revelation 7:9), and the guests at a wedding supper (Revelation 19:1–9). This is buttressed by the imagery of some of Jesus' parables where attaining heaven was compared to attending a banquet (Luke 14:15–24) or entering into the joy of one's Master (Matthew 25:21, 23).

From the perspective of life in this world, heaven is the object of human longing and the goal of human existence. The book of Hebrews employs the imagery of quest to express this reality: These all died in faith, not having received what was promised. ... For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland (see Hebrews 11:13–14).

In addition to being the goal of a quest, heaven is the reward for earthly toil, as in Paul's picture of himself as having *finished the race* and looking forward to *the crown of righteousness* (2 Timothy 4:7–8). We see this imagery again in Peter's vision of *the Chief Shepherd* conferring *the unfading crown of glory* on those who have served faithfully (1 Peter 5:4 NASB). There is also the glorious picture of believers having come to *Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God* where thousands upon thousands of angels are in joyful assembly (Hebrews 12:22 NIV).

Images of satisfaction emerge from the pictures in Revelation of saints being guided by a divine Shepherd to springs of living water (Revelation 7:17), and having access to ... *the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month* (Revelation 22:2).

Heaven is also portrayed as a rest after labor: those who die in the Lord “*rest from their labors, and their [deeds] follow them*” (Revelation 14:13). Similarly, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God, which believers strive to enter (see Hebrews 4:9–11).

As we conclude this week, I exhort you to prayerfully consider the beautiful words of the song, “For All the Saints.” Be comforted as you meditate on Christ's faithfulness to all His dear saints who are now at rest from their labors, like Polycarp and his brethren at the church of Smyrna. As you read stanzas 3–5, consider this a prayer of faith for your own life and anticipate the joy and satisfaction that lies ahead of you in heaven!

For All the Saints

*For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
And win with them the victor's crown of gold
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Thro' gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

—William H. How, 1823–1897

Week 16—Cling to Christ

(Revelation 2:12–17—The Church at Pergamos)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you cling to Christ!



SUNDAY: The Security of Christ's Plan

... [We] *are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time* (Peter 1:5, emphasis added).

This week we will tackle one of the hardest parts of Christian living—being *in* the world, but not *of* the world; loving the *lost*, but not loving the world system. That is the message that Christ's challenge brought to the church at Pergamos.

Geographically, Pergamos was a city eighty miles north of Smyrna, fifteen miles inland from the Aegean Sea, on a hill 1,000 feet above the fertile valleys. *Historically*, when John wrote in A.D. 95, it was an old city that had been the capital of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) for 300 years. *Culturally*, it was a university town, having the largest library in the ancient world, rivaling that of Alexandria. With 200,000 volumes, Pergamos was noted for producing the parchment (boiled animal skins) on which books were written.

Theologically, it may be that Satan himself had a personal throne in Pergamos as headquarters for his global rebellion during that period of time (Revelation 2:13). Satan, “*the ruler of this world*” (John 12:31), was served by his hierarchy of servants that followed him: *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12).

Pergamos, the focal point of Satan's kingdom, was a sacred city to the pagans. Worship of the king of the gods of the Graeco-Roman religion of Zeus (Jupiter) was headquartered there. Pagans also worshiped Aesculapius, the false god of healing. False healing has always been a tool of Satan to persuade people that there is divine power coming upon them, for he consistently imitates God. Because all parts of life had a god attached in that city, a pantheon of gods was worshiped there.

Practically, Pergamos was an awful place to try to live for Jesus because it was the immorality center of the ancient world. Can you imagine being in a composite of the glitz of Las Vegas, the immoral filth of Mardi Gras, and the ease of access to evil on the Internet—all in one place? Pergamos was just like that due to the worship of Dionysus (Bacchus), the gods of orgies, wine, and debauchery.

And in that place was a church—the assembly at Pergamos—which testifies that God can grow His church anywhere, even in one of the most desperate places. Many Pergamite saints had been converted from Satanism, idolatry, false healing, and immorality. Because they became very secure in Christ, they flourished for Him right where He planted them, even sitting under the throne of Satan: *“I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith ...”* (Revelation 2:13).

The church at Pergamos, however, had a problem. Some had lost their vital joys of being born again; they no longer had purity of life, intimacy with God, and nourishment from His Word. How did that happen? They had gotten too close to the world by mixing with it, marrying it, or loving the system. But Jesus lovingly offered a solution to their woeful problems, and ours: Repent of worldliness; do not be conformed to the world like unbelievers who are driven by earthly goals, desires, and values!

If you have lost your purity, Christ says, “Come back, and I’ll give you My white stone” (Revelation 2:17c). He wants to wash and cleanse you, and make you as pure and white as snow! *If you have lost your intimacy*, Christ says, “Come back, and I’ll give you My new name—a name which *“no one knows except him who receives it”* (Revelation 2:17d). He wants to draw you to spend precious and intimate time alone with Him! *If you have lost your nourishment*, Christ says, “Come back, and I’ll feed you with My hidden manna” (Revelation 2:17b; see also Jeremiah 15:16). He wants to nourish you in His Word!

How inescapable is the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, as He penetrates every heart, searching for each person’s condition. There is no sin too dark, no stain too deep, and no life too defiled that the blood of Jesus Christ cannot cleanse. The ultimate lesson from this church is that Jesus Christ wants us to cling to *Him*—and *not* to the world!

My Prayer for You This Week: *We bow before You, Lord Jesus, our Savior. We want to discover the hope that You offer today. I pray that we will listen as You speak to us through this special letter to the church at Pergamos. Help us to find You as the hope to which we cling, the hope toward which we press, the hope which we truly possess as that which can never be taken away from us. And then, with that hope in mind, help us to prepare for the time when you will call us home. For You have told us that as Christians we can get ready so that we can die in a way that will glorify You. Help us to learn that precious and very blessed message of hope! Open our eyes and hearts we pray! In Jesus’ precious name. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Security of Christ's Purity

*“Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5:8, emphasis added).

Beware of the new paganism in the twenty-first-century church. The majority of those who call themselves Christians follow a way of worship that would have offended the apostles and early saints. What do I mean? Would they not see the statues of Christ and saints as idols? Would they not equate the candles and incense burning with that of pagan temple worship? Would they not have trouble with the separation into orders of priests and monks, and taking on the titles of pontiff, vicar, and “most excellent,” very offensive and contradictory to Christlike humility? The calendar of observances, holy water, purgatory, and so much more would not have been accepted because it all came directly from the pagans—whom the early saints tried to *convert*.

Christ's letter to the church at Pergamos warns of the deadly sin of being in love and communion with that which God has condemned and will destroy. There is only one action to take when confronted with worldliness and apostasy: *separate from it!*

The Word of God says, *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness [believers] with lawlessness [unbelievers]? ... For you are the temple of the living God. ... [Therefore] “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you”* (2 Corinthians 6:14, 16–17).

The proper thing to do when involved in something that is apostate is to get out of it. Where Christ's name is dishonored, and there is false teaching and idolatry, *leave*. Separate from it physically; do not participate, for *Whoever ... wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?* (James 4:4–5).

Those are very sobering words. The Holy Spirit is inside of us, and is jealous for us. We are espoused to Christ as His pure bride. We are not to get our clothes soiled needlessly with the love of the world. Look at James 4:7–8: *... Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

If we choose to go along with the flow of the world, there is something wrong (1 John 2:15). Because the Holy Spirit lives within us, we should not purposefully want to offend His holiness. Though we slip at times, and are weak, we will not wed ourselves to the world. Why? God will not let us. He will chasten us: *For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh [chasing after pleasure], the lust of the eyes [chasing after stuff], and the pride of life [chasing after status]—is not of the Father but is of the world* (1 John 2:16–17).

This is a prophetic message for us today: God will destroy commercial and religious Babylon. This message is also to people of all ages who think they can reform an apostate religion by

staying in it. In Revelation 18:4 Christ says, *“Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”*

Visiting the Great Physician may be painful, but you can trust His diagnosis. For only Jesus can see exactly what is good, bad, and dangerous. When He ran a diagnostic test on the saints at Pergamos, this was His analysis of their needs: *“But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality”* (Revelation 2:14).

The Pergamite saints were saved—they claimed the true name, and they didn’t deny Christ in fierce trials. For that, they were to be commended. Nevertheless, Christ said, “You are in sin, and I have a few things against you ...” His rebuke was related to *“the doctrine of Balaam”* which represents compromise. In Numbers 22–24, Balaam taught the Moabites that the way to defeat God’s people was through leading them to compromise their obedience to God’s Word. Hence the old adage: “If you can’t defeat them, join them; defile them so that God will judge them.” Christ therefore warned the church at Pergamos: *“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly ...”* (Revelation 2:16a). What Christ said to the church then, He also says to the twenty-first-century church.

Many begin well in Christ, but then gradually slip away and lose their first love. Over the next few days, by observing the life of Samson, we will see a powerful scriptural example of the dangers of not staying alert to the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11–13).

Do you feel yourself slipping back into sin? Then Christ lovingly says to you, “Repent, and come back to Me today!”

TUESDAY: Samson Began Well

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him (Judges 13:24, emphasis added).

God recorded Samson’s life as an example of both the destructive power of sin and the restoring power of grace. His life is a testament to the fact that if you sow to the flesh, you will reap corruption; if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap life everlasting (see Galatians 6:7–8).

Samson was one of the most amazing Old Testament personages. So many details in his life are unique, and thus profound in their meaning. For example, God’s angels announced his birth. He was one of only three people whose births were announced by angels (Jesus and Isaac are the other two). So Samson started in the top 1/10 of 1 percent of all the 3,000 people named in the Bible.

Amazing as it might seem, because they sought God’s help raising him, Samson’s parents rank up there with the fewest of the few. Only Joseph and Mary, Job, Abraham, Hannah, and Samson’s dad, Manoah, are recorded in the Bible as asking for and receiving wisdom from God on how to raise their children. Samson’s parents feared the Lord, and they wanted to instill that same awesome reverence in their son.

Although God has a special purpose for all His saints, only a few people in the Old Testament (Jeremiah, Samuel, and Samson) are identified as being chosen from birth for a particular purpose. (In the New Testament, John the Baptist and Paul were selected for that same distinction.) Before Samson was born, God declared that he was to be a Nazirite (Judges 13:5). Such a “God’s man” was to be outwardly committed to total abstinence from wine, avoidance of dead bodies, and never cutting his hair. The inward response to this special calling was to be a chosen life; everything he did was to point to the Lord through obedience. God, coupled with the Nazirite vow, gave Samson a special supernatural strength.

Physically, Samson was only an ordinary Israelite, about 5’ 2” to 5’ 4” tall, with no outward sign of strength, just the mark of his consecration. Now picture that size man picking up the gates to a city, ripping them off their hinges, setting them on his shoulders, and walking away with them! The archaeological reports of the digs of the city of Gaza and all the Philistine encampments revealed that the city gates were twelve feet wide, set down into solid stone, and built into solid walls. They were massive wooden gates, often covered with iron that easily weighed tons. Ancient Jewish tradition says Samson left the gates on a hilltop, just outside of town, as a mockery to the city. He definitely had supernatural strength!

To have grown up with Samson must have been a remarkable experience. His neighborhood pals would certainly have been awed at his immense strength, and his enemies must have fled quickly. Having him around would have been like having a one-man army. Yet he often lived in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Surprisingly, in the final analysis, God viewed Samson as a man of faith. What a picture of grace! At his darkest hour, in one moment of godly sorrow that led to a repentant prayer of faith, God brought him back to the place of blessing. Oh, what a wonderful truth! Our God is the God of the second chance! When I think of that fact, it makes me burst forth into singing, “Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt ...”! I always like to say: “If Samson made it—anybody can.” He was about as far defiled as one can get, yet through grace, he became one of God’s dear heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:32).

Have you experienced the miraculous grace of the God of the second chance?

WEDNESDAY: Sin Blinds, Binds, and Grinds

*... These ... became **our examples** ... that we should not lust ... as they ... lusted* (1 Corinthians 10:6, emphasis added).

As a young man, probably in his teens, we get the first indicator that Samson greatly needed God’s grace. When he began to live by his own desires instead of God’s, and serve his own lusts instead of God’s Words, Samson was no longer heading in the direction in which the Lord had pointed him.

A string of women began to parade through his life. In fact, seven times Samson was guided by the lust of his eyes when he “*saw a woman that pleased him.*” Each was a dangerous choice.

The final, and deadliest woman, was Delilah. She was so deadly that even today her name has become synonymous with lust, deceit, betrayal, and ruin. C. H. Spurgeon's summary says it all:

At last he falls into the hands of Delilah. She is bribed with an enormous sum, and she endeavors to get from him the secret of his strength. He foolishly plays with his own destruction. At last he lets out the secret, his strength lay in his locks. Not that his hair made him strong; but that his hair was the symbol of his consecration, and was the pledge of God's favor to him.

While his hair was untouched he was a consecrated man; as soon as that was cut away, he was no longer perfectly consecrated, and then his strength departed from him. His hair is cut away; the Philistines begin to oppress him, and his eyes are burned out with hot iron. How are the mighty fallen!

And now he comes to the very city out of which he had walked in all his pride with the gates and bolts upon his shoulders; and the little children come out, the lower orders of the people come round about him, and point at him—"Samson, the great hero, hath fallen! Let us make sport of him!" What a spectacle!

Why, he must be the sport and jest of every passerby, and of every fool who shall step in to see this great wonder—the destroyer of the Philistines made to toil at the mill. That he should have lost his eyes was terrible; that he should have lost his strength was worse; but that he should have lost the favor of God for a while; that he should become the sport of God's enemies, was the worst of all.¹

Though Samson descended into the depths of a lust-filled life, and wandered far from his calling and consecration, the Lord never let go of him. (That should give us great hope for those we know who are born again, yet are wandering far from Christ.) His soiled life is recorded; his defeats are unvarnished and clear for all to see. But against the backdrop of Samson's sin is a reminder of the powerful beauty of God's grace.

Practicing sin blinds us, then slowly binds us with its fetters, and then, finally blinded and bound, we begin to grind through life. Talk to anybody who has come to Christ out of an immoral life, the drug culture, or the world of alcohol and bars, and you will find that it is not the exciting life that the media claims it to be. Living in that manner can never satisfy because it is always a passing pleasure. Only God can break the fetters that blind and bind us to grind out an existence totally captive to sin! God forgives—and He beautifully restores!

THURSDAY: The Consequence Engine in Action

... I discipline my body ..., lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27, emphasis added).

The life of Samson depicts the awful consequences of living a life of compromise with the world and the flesh. Judges 13 records one of the most incredible accounts in the Bible; few are as tragic as this one. God had given Samson twenty years to begin to overcome the enemy, the Philistines. However, in the end, Samson was overcome by the greatest enemy of all—himself. Samson's history is an illustration of Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 9:27 (see above). Heaven remembers Samson as a man of faith, but earth remembers him as a man who was "*disqualified*." Although Hebrews 11:32 cites him for his faith, apart from this, very little can be said in his defense. The lesson to each of us is this: *Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

What steps led to Samson's sin and tragic end?

Samson wandered from his heritage. He was born into a godly home. *The Angel of the LORD* [Jesus Christ pre-incarnate] appeared to [Manoah's wife] *and said to her, "... You shall conceive and bear a son. ... Please be careful [before his birth] not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. ... And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines"* (Judges 13:3–5).

Samson had a godly giftedness and calling. God gave him a special endowment of the Holy Spirit that made him a conqueror (Judges 13:25). When he was old enough to understand, his parents informed him that God had called him to be a Nazirite, a "separated one" wholly surrendered to the Lord. When grown, however, Samson despised his wonderful heritage. Instead of putting himself in God's hands to accomplish his God-given task, he tragically chose to live to please himself.

Samson disobeyed his parents, which gave clear evidence of his spiritual decline. He knew that the God-given Jewish laws of separation meant marrying only within the covenant people, but that didn't matter to him. Samson went into enemy territory and fell in love with a heathen woman. He *told* (not *asked*) his father: "*Get her for me, for she pleases me well*" (Judges 14:3). Samson's focus was totally outward: he only viewed the woman's body, but never saw her inner spirit, soul, or character. He was living for the moment, for the lusts of his flesh (see Genesis 24:1–4; Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3; and 2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

By disobeying his parents, Samson was choosing to be his own authority. He therefore ignored their admonition: "Don't do that, Samson!" It did not bother him that his desires displeased his parents. God overruled in this circumstance, however, because He knew Samson's propensity for sin, and was going to use his lust as a vehicle of His judgment on the Philistines (Judges 14:4). However, I can imagine God holding Samson accountable for his actions, saying, "Be not deceived, for I will not be mocked. What Samson sowed, he is going to reap."

What valuable lesson can we learn from this? Christian young people need to stop and consider carefully when they find themselves defying godly parents who know God's Word. It is a fearsome matter when God is against someone who refuses to repent.

FRIDAY: When God Is Against Us

... *Whoever ... wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*
(James 4:4, emphasis added).

Yesterday we looked at two steps Samson took that eventually led to his sin and tragic end: he wandered from his heritage (Judges 13), and he disobeyed his parents (Judges 14:1–4). Now let us look at some other steps that led to Samson’s total downfall.

Samson compromised his life. He was supposed to be a man of the Word, to be a mighty judge, but he sought to be unequally yoked instead. So the Lord sent Samson some ominous warnings. The first was a big one. On his way to visit his bride-to-be, a young lion came roaring against him. The lion was representative of the devil who ... *walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8b). What a picture! The devil wanted to use him for his purposes, for he knew that Samson was going in his direction by following his lust.

As the lion attacked him, look what happened: *And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand ...* (Judges 14:6). Talk about an amazing super-human strength! Even though Samson was not walking completely in God’s will, He provided the power to overcome the lion—but he did not get the Lord’s message.

When Samson went back later to complete the marriage, he was tested again. Although Nazirites were never to touch a dead body, for the sake of a little honey in the lion’s carcass, Samson defiled himself. (Many Christians today likewise defile themselves just to enjoy “a little honey in the carcass of a lion”—perhaps with a questionable book, movie, or friendship.) Sad to say, Samson passed that sinfully gained honey along to his parents, and then made a joke about it to entertain his friends!

Samson ignored God’s warnings. When Samson burned the fields of the Philistines, they retaliated by burning the woman he had loved, her father, and their house (Judges 15:6 and 14:15). After he avenged their deaths, his own people turned against him and delivered him to the enemy (Judges 15:11–13). Although Samson was rescued by God, this test had been another warning to show how weak he really was.

Judges 15 is a chapter of seeming victories, yet it ends with the “strong man” utterly exhausted for lack of water. That need prompted one of the two prayers Scripture records Samson made: for water (Judges 15:18–20), and for strength to destroy the Philistines (Judges 16:28). Samson’s parents had been prayerful people, but he never followed their example. Thus, he still would not heed God.

Samson played with sin. (See Judges 16.) His heart was far from the God he should have known, and loved, and served. Even though he’d already gotten into trouble with one woman, he now tried again. This time his lusts took him deep into enemy territory to Gaza. Pride had taken hold of him; after all, he was “Superman,” so he marched right into the epicenter of the Philistine army to pursue another woman.

This time, God warned him by allowing the enemy to almost catch him, but Samson would not repent. Then Delilah came into his life and led him to his doom. Three times she enticed Samson, and three times he lied to her. Each lie he told took him one step closer to having the truth about his strength revealed. When the enemy attacked him afterward each time, he should have realized he was in danger. (Read Proverbs 7:21–27 to see why Samson yielded.) He was asleep when he should have been awake. How dangerous it is to play with sin!

What was Samson's problem? He was *dominated by lust*. That passion led Samson to desire a Philistine woman as a wife, which was strictly forbidden by God's Law. That passion also led him to liaisons with prostitutes like Delilah (who betrayed him for money). Many times men will say, "I'm doing that because I love her." But that is not really true: love can wait, lust can't. Do you know the difference between love and lust? Can you wait? If you can't, it's lust. Love always waits.²

Samson was also *driven by pride and revenge*. He was more moved by anger at personal affronts—which caused him to strike out at the Philistines—than by the suffering of the people he was supposed to lead (cf. 14:19–20; 15:7–8; 16:28).

In the end, Samson was *defeated by himself*. Imagine what Samson might have been if, with his great strength and godly heritage, he had daily lived out the formal commitment to God expressed in that Nazirite vow!

The Tragic End of Disobedience: The rest of the story shows the disastrous end of the believer who will not let God have His way with his or her life. From Judges 16:20 on, Samson does nothing but lose: he lost his full usefulness to the Lord, his testimony, and ultimately his life. And all this started when Samson despised his blessings and defied his parents!

Samson ended up as a castaway: he had committed the sin unto death, so God had to take him off the scene. But before he died, God allowed Samson one last act of faith—and a huge victory over the Philistines. (Although his usefulness had been diminished, it had not been completely lost.) That victory was a great triumph in a life littered with tragedy.

What can we learn from Samson's tragic life? There is no such thing as being able to safely play around with a little bit of sin. Remember: sin first blinds, then binds, and finally grinds. No matter how alluring it may seem, habitual sin grinds away at the soul, like gravel in the mouth (Proverbs 20:17).

If you willfully choose to operate in your own strength, and fail to heed God's warnings, He will let you operate without walking in the Spirit, and you will reap what you have sown.

SATURDAY: A Day of Reckoning

... We must all *appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, that each one may receive the things done in the body, ... whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10, emphasis added).

Just as the assembly at Pergamos faced the judgment of God for sin that was never dealt with in their lives, so will we if we don't repent. Because God *hates* sin, we need to flee from it and fear the holiness of God.

As a warning to everyone called to lifelong consecration to the Lord, let's look at what happened to Samson in New Testament terms. Here are some passages, which explain that there are "sins unto death."

All New Testament believers are consecrated to the Lord, like Samson was: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Spirit is so specific. There were two words in the ancient world for "temple": we are not the *hieron*, which means "the whole temple building"; we are *naos*, which means "the most protected part," the sacred chamber where God dwelt, or "the Holy of Holies." Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. Don't offer excuses or try to justify your sin, because God says you and I are to be consecrated.

We will each answer to God for what we did with our bodies: *Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because ... the fire will test each one's work If anyone's work ... endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Corinthians 3:13–15, emphasis added).

Have you ever heard the term of getting into heaven "by the skin of your teeth"? There are people who are going to be in heaven, but that is all. They are going to suffer the loss of their earthly life because they were "Samsons" who lived for the lust of their eyes, the lust of their flesh, and the pride of life. The sins that God has forgiven will burn away, and anything not for God's glory, in obedience to God, will also be burned away in God's refining fire. God, therefore, wants us to redeem our time as carefully as possible. Although life is more than Bible reading and prayer, everything we do should still be done for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

God will not stand by as we sin: *For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged* (1 Corinthians 11:30–31). What is "sleep"? Biblically, "sleep" refers to the death of the body, but the spirit is with Christ. Some believers get weak, sick, and die—not because they're at that age when it is time for it to happen (and it is a glorious home going), but because they did not deal with their pride, lust, and fleshly appetites.

God gives us warnings and chastens us to prove His love: *"Whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives"* (Hebrews 12:6). Those who will not separate from the love of the world will be chastened. One might say, "Well, I'm living it up and doing what I want and nothing is happening." Hebrews 12:8 should speak to you then: if you are *without* chastening, then you are illegitimate and *not a child of God*. God says that *all* His sons and daughters will be disciplined if they continue to live in sin.

Going too far in sin can be deadly for believers: *... There is sin leading to death. ... All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death* (1 John 5:16b–17). What that unusual language means is this: if you go too far, too long, God will say, "That is enough!" He will then take you out of the world. What happened to Samson? He went too far, too long, and God took

him out. He tragically sinned to the point that God felt his ministry must end, even though he had repented.

God kills believers who won't repent in time: “... *Unless they repent of their deeds ... I will kill her children with death ...*” (Revelation 2:22–23). God has a time period. He waits, chastens, weakens, and sickens His continually disobedient children. And when that does not bring about godly sorrow that leads to repentance, then God kills believers who will not repent: “... *All the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works*” (Revelation 2:23).

Apparently, during the grinding at the mill, Samson repented of his sin. The Philistines had made this sightless former hero their center of attraction, like an amusement park. But while that was going on, God offered him one more merciful chance to act by faith. His hair had begun to grow, Samson remembered his calling, and he asked God for strength to win one more victory over the enemy (Judges 16:28–30). He accomplished more in that one prayer than he did in twenty years of fighting. He defeated the Philistines, but in defeating others, he lost his own life.

Samson illustrates people who have power to conquer others, but who cannot conquer themselves. He could set the Philistine fields on fire, but could not control the fires of his own lust. He could kill an attacking lion, but could not put to death the passions of his own flesh. He could easily break the bonds that men put on him, but the shackles of his own sin gradually grew stronger on his soul. And He could have led the nation, but he preferred to work independently and, as a result, left no permanent victory behind.

Samson could have been remembered for what he built up, but instead everyone except God only remembers what he destroyed—lions, foxes, fields, gates, soldiers, women's purity, thousands of God's enemies, and his own life and ministry.

Make a choice to live in hope. Samson's life is a powerful reminder of God's grace. Even if you have lived like Samson, it is not too late to turn in faith, repent, and look to God. If you are a lost person, turn to Christ while you can still hear His voice, and then cling to Him. If you are a believer, you have not gone too far yet to miss God's grace; respond and cling to Him while there is still time. But if you willfully choose to continue in your sin, you *can* go too far: there is indeed a sin that leads to death. Sin destroys, but God beautifully restores! If the God of the second chance has spoken to your heart today, I encourage you to pray or sing this song in faith to the Lord.

I Need Thee Every Hour

*I need Thee every hour, Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine Can peace afford.*

*I need Thee every hour; Stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their power When Thou art nigh.*

*I need Thee every hour, In joy or pain.
Come quickly, and abide, Or life is vain.*

*I need Thee every hour; Teach me Thy will,
And Thy rich promises In me fulfill.*

*I need Thee every hour, Most Holy One;
O make me Thine indeed, Thou blessed Son.*

*I need Thee, O I need Thee; every hour I need Thee!
O bless me now, my Savior—I come to Thee!*

—Annie S. Hawks, 1835–1918
Refrain added by Robert Lowry

Week 17—Honor Christ's Holiness

(Revelation 2:18–29—The Church at Thyatira)

As the end of days approaches, you can find
hope as you honor Christ's holiness!



SUNDAY: Holiness Is Fearing Sin

... *The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ **depart from iniquity**"* (2 Timothy 2:19, emphasis added).

The letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven letters Christ wrote to His church. Yet Thyatira, located thirty miles from Pergamos and Sardis, is the least described of all the seven churches in Revelation. In fact, the only thing we know is the name of the first Christian from Thyatira. On Paul's second journey, as he stopped in Philippi, he led a seeking woman to Jesus, a "*seller of purple* [scarlet fabrics]" (Acts 16:14). Lydia, a merchant from Thyatira, was his first European convert.

Thyatira was renowned for its trade guilds. Much like our unions of today, the guilds set prices for labor, sales areas, and so forth. Potters, dyers, tanners, bakers, metal workers, textile makers, bronze smiths, slave dealers, leather workers, and the rest all had their guilds in this town.

Trade guilds were compulsory; to be employed in a trade was only via the guild. It was a closed shop. Every guild in Thyatira had a patron god or goddess, and every guild function began with paying homage to that deity by an obligatory offering; business followed, and then the customary banquets known for their sexual freedom.

Sir William Ramsay, the famed nineteenth-century archaeologist, described the scene of what he had excavated as being a place where intoxicated partygoers indulged themselves in immorality as the standard conduct of these pagan religious societies [trade guilds]. To think of a believer lounging at a meal surrounded by strippers is not where any believer would want Christ to find

them asking for deliverance from temptation. In short, a guild was no place for Christians, but quitting the union was economic suicide.

Thyatira was the church of the Dark Ages (A.D. 600-1500); this period covered from the time of the first pope, Gregory the Great, to the Reformation. If Pergamos was the church that was first wed to the world, then Thyatira was the dead church that had been living a long time in that condition.

Have you, like the wayward Thyatirans, been “dead” inside for a long time? If you have not said no to all sin in your life, and said yes to Christ by asking Him to give you clean hands and a pure heart, that neglect can trigger the chastening hand of God. Our Scripture meditation this week, Revelation 2:18–29, reminds us that Jesus Christ is “*He who searches the minds and hearts.*” He very explicitly speaks of what happens to those who refuse to come before Him in purity. The chastening hand of God is real, and it will reach out and touch you if you do not choose to fear the Lord.

Fearing the Lord (appearing over 100 times in God’s Word) is a huge scriptural concept—for God commands reverential awe that leads to loving obedience. Have you learned to fear the dreadful consequences of sin? I exhort you to listen this week to Christ’s call to holiness!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Lord Jesus, You have written this letter to the church at Thyatira, and we believe in the inerrant, inspired, supernatural revelation of Your Book; it is the very Word of You, the living God; and You, the living Word. Lord Jesus, we ask that Your Spirit would communicate Your words to our hearts with conviction and piercing sharpness that we might fear Your chastisement. And that in fearing You we might say no to sin and yes to Your sanctifying process in our lives. Search our hearts and know our innermost thoughts. May we at all times abhor, turn from, flee, and disregard the allurements of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the horrible pride of life. Illumine us; touch our hearts with clarity, understanding, and insight into Your Word as we come before You seeking. In the lovely name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Holiness Is Wanting to Grow

... **Grow in** the grace and knowledge of **our Lord** and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever ... (2 Peter 3:18, emphasis added).

The fear of the Lord is a reverential, awesome awareness of how holy God is, and how unholy we are. The phrase “the fear of the Lord” is repeated often in the Bible, but it does not tell us that we are to live in an attitude of terror, *for God has not given us a spirit of fear* (2 Timothy 1:7). As God’s children we are to reverence the Lord so much that we will not deliberately disobey Him or try His patience. We must have a holy respect for God.

Consider this illustration: When I was a little boy, one of my friends was mowing the lawn barefooted. He was pushing the mower up the side of a drainage ditch and got distracted. The mower rolled back down and cut off his toes. It is hard to walk without toes because they help us balance. For the rest of my time growing up, I remembered the great difficulty that boy had, so I learned to fear the lawn mower. No, I don't lie awake at night thinking it is going to come out of the garage and get me, but when I start the mower, I have my children stand back out of the way. And when I push it, I always remember how quickly that spinning blade can do great damage. My fear of the lawn mower caused me to be respectful of its power, and to do nothing that could lead to harm in my life.

Our fear of God should likewise cause us to respect His power, and do nothing that could lead to His displeasure and consequent chastisement. While it is true that we can now boldly come to Christ, we must always remember *who* He is: He is always *God*. If we cultivate this kind of fear, we will realize that there is great benefit in fearing Him. Here are some of the benefits that are ours through fearing the Lord:

- **Fearing the Lord shows us what can last forever:** *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever ...* (Psalm 19:9). If you will attach your life and all your desires to Him, what you do, what you are, and what you have will last for eternity.
- **Fearing the Lord gives eternal wisdom:** *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments ...* (Psalm 111:10). Fearing God and obedience always go together. If you fear God, you will obey Him.
- **Fearing the Lord reflects the eternal character of Christ:** *The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him [the promised Christ], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD ...* (Isaiah 11:2–3). This is a prophecy of Christ, like the one in Isaiah: the seven-fold Spirit of God—the complete ministry of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. When we fear Him, as we yield to His Spirit, we will reflect the holy character of our triune God and be walking in Christlikeness.
- **Fearing the Lord produces eternal riches:** *Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, and the strength of salvation; the fear of the LORD is His treasure* (Isaiah 33:6). Our real treasure is found in fearing the Lord; even things like economic upheavals cannot take that treasure away.

This is the wonder of Christ: you can make a decision right now that will totally transform how you experience Him. Remove the idea that you are just a spectator and engage yourself by participating fully in worship and service to Him, whether at church or in daily life. As you

ponder what has been said—all that lines up with the Word of God—respond wholeheartedly by saying “Yes!” to the Lord.

TUESDAY: Holiness Is Staying Pure

... We should *live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ ...* (Titus 2:12–13, emphasis added).

The fear of the Lord prompts us to seek to be as pure as possible on this sin-cursed earth, and that leads to personal holiness. If you want to advance your walk with the Lord, this exhortation is critical: ... *Having these promises [the Word of God], beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh ...* (2 Corinthians 7:1a).

The apostle Paul said that he was as susceptible to picking up the filth of the flesh as we are. He abhorred it, so he purposefully closed the door to it. Every time we leave the door open through anger, an unforgiving and bitter spirit, lust, or an insubordinate and rebellious attitude toward authorities, it is like letting wild animals come into our house. If a tiger had escaped from your local zoo and was prowling your neighborhood, would you go to bed that night and leave your door open?

Shut the door to temptations. Listen to how Peter encouraged those early saints of Roman Asia in his first letter: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8).

The devil wants to discourage us and make us doubt God’s power and promises. That is what Paul warned us about. We must not give the devil a foothold in our lives through sin (see Ephesians 4:25–32). The instant we are aware of any wrong decision and filthiness of the flesh, we should seek Jesus Christ’s cleansing. But there is also filthiness of the spirit, which is coming to God unprepared. Again look at what Paul said to cleanse: *filthiness of the flesh and spirit* (2 Corinthians 7:1b, emphasis added).

God wants us to have cleanness of the flesh and of the spirit. If you were invited to an event honoring a dignitary, but it required formal dress, would you attend in old ragged clothes and dirty tennis shoes? If so, you would not be allowed in. Why? Dignitaries deserve respect; they demand respect. Therefore, you must come before God with the right attitude and make sure you are not holding on to sin. You must cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit in order to be *perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (2 Corinthians 7:1c).

This touching story reflects the lifestyle we are to cultivate: A teen once demonstrated this heart attitude when his friends suggested that they go to a certain restaurant for a good time. “I’d rather go home; my parents don’t approve of that place.” “Afraid your father will hurt you?” one of the girls asked sarcastically. “No,” he replied, “I’m not afraid my father will hurt me, but I am afraid I might hurt him.”

Young people: love your parents' desires so much that you don't want to go against them. A true child of God, who has experienced the love of God, has no desire to sin against that love. That is how you will know when you have reached adulthood. Be motivated by love. Obey God, not because you are afraid that He will punish you, but because you love Him so much that you don't want to ruin your relationship with Him—you don't want His Spirit to be grieved and quenched.

WEDNESDAY: Holiness Is Making Right Choices

"... Choose ... this day whom you will serve But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15, emphasis added).

Clearly, having a reverential fear of God is not optional: ... *Be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day; for surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off* (Proverbs 23:17–18). We are to *"fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28).

We do not have to fear that our soul is going to go to hell, but we do need to fear that God will destroy our body if we do not repent of sin. The chastisement of Jesus Christ goes from conviction of sin, to the grieving of the Holy Spirit, to the quenching of the Holy Spirit, to weakness of the body, to sickness of the body, then to death. This is clearly taught in 1 Corinthians 11, 1 John 5, and Revelation 2–3.

Fearing God has both positive and negative elements: ... *Obey in all things ..., fearing God* (Colossians 3:22). In a positive way, every true believer has reverential fear of God—an awesome awareness of His power, His holiness, and His glory. Proper worship always includes that kind of fear of the Lord.

"The negative aspect" writes John MacArthur, "... has to do with dread and terror. Even believers should have a measure of that kind of fear, which acts as a protection from sinning. The writer of Proverbs observed, 'By the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil' (16:6). For the very reason they are God's children, believers are subject to His chastisement (see Heb. 12:5–11). Sometimes His dealing with disobedient believers can be severe, as with Ananias and Sapphira, who lost their lives for lying to the Holy Spirit. God used that punishment to produce godly fear and obedience within the early church (see Acts 5:1–11). Some of the believers in the church at Corinth also died or became ill by the direct infliction of God's chastisement for their sin (1 Corinthians 11:30)."¹

Every day we face this choice: serve Christ or the world. The letters in Revelation have a timely application for our lives. They each emphasize why and how we must fear Jesus.

- **Ephesus (2:1–7):** Remember that Jesus is jealous of your love so lay hold of your first love for Christ.

- **Smyrna (2:8–11):** Hope in Jesus through life until the end and trust Christ through your suffering.
- **Pergamos (2:12–17):** Rest in the security that comes from clinging only to Jesus and conform to Christ, not the world.
- **Thyatira (2:18–29):** Fear the chastening love of Jesus so He will not have to discipline sin in the church.

As it was in Thyatira, so it is in your life today. Daily you have opportunities to either please God or please self. But for a devoted believer, there is only one right choice: honor the holiness of Jesus by purposing in your heart to respond in obedience to Him regardless of the cost.

THURSDAY: Holiness Is Pleasing Jesus

*... We urge ... that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how **you ought** to walk and **to please God** ...* (1 Thessalonians 4:1, emphasis added).

In the first chapter of Revelation, John captures several characteristics of Christ that point to fearing the Lord. Each characteristic is a wonderful lesson to meditate on throughout the day.

Jesus is God the Son. The “*Son of God*” in Revelation 2:18 is not the same as the *Son of Man* in Revelation 1:13. “*Son of God*” signifies the fullness of His divine power. Why does He introduce Himself as the Son of God? He is warning His church not to compromise nor tolerate evil.

Jesus is all-seeing, all-knowing, and always present. He has *eyes like a flame of fire* (1:14). Why does He say that? Because Christ is always penetrating, discerning, seeing, and assessing the thoughts and actions of man: “*I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, ...*” *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are ... open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account* (Jeremiah 17:10; Hebrews 4:13).

Jesus is the Judge of the entire universe, and of my sin. He has feet like “burnished bronze” (1:15a). Bronze almost always pictures judgment upon sin: “*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son ...*” (John 5:22).

The author of Revelation is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, with fullness of divine power, with searching eyes, who alone knows our hearts and will mete out judgment accordingly. Always remember that Jesus Christ knows your heart perfectly well today, and is ready to judge if necessary.

Before Jesus addressed the corruption in the church at Thyatira, He acknowledged these good things about its saints: “*I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first*” (Revelation 2:19).

Jesus commended the Thyatirans for these qualities: Christ saw what they did for Him; He saw their love (this is the only church with love noted); their ministry as servants to others; their

faithfulness, loyalty, and fidelity; their steadfast endurance; and that they were growing because their latter deeds were greater than those at the beginning.

Here is a lesson to meditate upon: The Christian life is a life of works, love, service, faith, and patience. Christ commended the saints at Thyatira because they did not pull back in their service. Paul gave the Thessalonians a similar commendation: *We ... thank God always for you ... because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other ...* (2 Thessalonians 1:3). The spiritual lives of these Thessalonians did not hit a peak and then decline. If Christ is alive in you, there will be growth. No growth indicates that you are sick, and that you need to honor Christ's holiness by returning to Him.

If you can remember a time when you served and loved the Lord more than now, you need to repent, or end up like the Thyatirans who failed to receive the approval of Christ. The Lord wants you to ever-increasingly love, seek, and worship Him!

FRIDAY: Holiness Is Staying Scriptural

"He who has My commandments and keeps them ... loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21, emphasis added).

What did the visiting Christ say that He had against the church at Thyatira? He said that there was toleration of evil in the assembly. Does that mean we shouldn't bring the lost to church? No, bring them—just don't start parading them as saints, redeemed ones, and part of the body of Christ. What was the evil? They allowed a disobedient and sinful woman to teach them: *"... I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and [seduce] My servants ..."* (Revelation 2:20). Who was Jezebel? She may have been the wife of a pastor or a powerful false teacher who was leading the church astray.

There is a heritage of women who have educated generations of young people. They have a gender specific role in the church, as they have in the family. However, they are not to be the primary teacher or leader of a church. This is normal—the world is abnormal. God said women are not to teach *the* church (1 Timothy 2:12), but they may teach *in* the church. Women are not less or inferior; God simply gave women a specific role that is subordinate. Jesus is subordinate to God the Father; the church is subordinate to Jesus Christ; men are subordinate to the church; and women are subordinate to men. Jesus is not less than God. This is how God ordained things. But the Thyatirans decided not to obey that divine order.

Women being in submission to men in the home and the church has its roots in Creation, not the Fall. This is mandatory in Christ's church: women are not to lead the assembly (1 Timothy 2:12–14; 1 Corinthians 14). But this Jezebel defied God's order and was leading Christ's bond-servants astray. However, that was not new. In 1 Kings 18, Ahab's Jezebel led Israel into gross idolatry and introduced male and female sex perverts into the priesthood of Baal worship. The falsehoods of Christian Science were started by Mary Baker Eddy. Theosophy's errors were

propounded by Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky. Seventh Day Adventism was led astray in the teachings of Ellen White, and so forth. Beware of women who go against God's Word and lead churches, for they will face judgment.

What can we learn from today's lesson? Be scriptural and be balanced. We should not be hard-hearted, legalistic, Ephesus-like Christians who harshly judge others and punish with loveless indifference. Neither should we be weak and limp, tolerating all in love, with no rules and no offense. Both legalism and undue tolerance lead to error and judgment. Be scriptural: know it and do it. Be balanced: love with a pure heart, and hate sin.

SATURDAY: Holiness Is Trusting Christ's Promises

"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:26–29).

In Revelation 2:25, when Jesus says, *"hold fast what you have till I come,"* He is making the first mention of His return in the seven letters. There are many precious promises concerning Christ's coming to remember. I'll share some of them with you now.

God will reward us with immeasurable treasures. This is an investment that will reap blessings which will never pass away: *"... There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—... and in the age to come, eternal life"* (Mark 10:29–30).

God will overwhelm us with unbelievable pleasures. When we reach heaven, we will finally become all that God created us to be: *... He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter* (2 Corinthians 12:4).

God will give true believers an important future. We will reign with Christ over the earth. I do not know what each of our specific duties will be, but we will have authority: *"... to him I will give power over the nations—'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—as I also have received from My Father"* (Revelation 2:26b–27).

God will give true believers a bright and glorious future. We can never lose Jesus' light, life, and hope in the dark and gloom, so we are on the winning team with Christ! Consider these precious promises: Jesus is *the Dayspring from on high* and salvation is described as when *"the day dawns and the morning star rises in [our] hearts"* (Luke 1:78; 2 Peter 1:19). What glory lies ahead for us! For *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). All true believers will make it safely to the end. Hallelujah!

Make a choice to live in hope. You cannot experience these pleasures if you come before God with unclean hands and filthiness of heart and spirit. Are you tolerating evil? Stop. Are you growing in Christ? If not, start. Are you pressing on to the end? Good—you're an overcomer! The words of this old song nicely describe the growth process of the Christian life—the desire to keep pressing on to honor Christ's holiness.

Higher Ground

*I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."*

*My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer, my aim is higher ground.*

*I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.*

*I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found,
"Lord, lead me on to higher ground."*

*Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on heaven's table land,
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

—Johnson Oatman, Jr., 1898

Week 18—Know Christ Personally

(Revelation 3:1–6—The Church at Sardis)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you make sure that you know Christ personally!



SUNDAY: Professing without Possessing

*“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, emphasis added).*

Sardis was a church planted in a very famous city of the ancient world—the home of Aesop and his fables. Situated at the junction of five roads, commanding the Hermus Valley, thirty miles northwest of Philadelphia, Sardis was a very wealthy commercial city. It had been the capital of King Croesus, who was proverbial for his riches. The city’s easy wealth apparently made them lax when it came to being alert to possible dangers.

Because Sardis lacked preparedness, it was conquered twice: by Cyrus the Persian (549 B.C.) and by Antiochus (218 B.C.). The city was built on a hill so steep that its defenses seemed impregnable. Yet on both occasions, enemy troops scaled the precipice by night and found that the overconfident Sardians had set no guard.

John does not mention anything like the persecutions at Smyrna and Pergamos, or the heresies of the Nicolaitans. It is worth noting, however, that this church differs from those at Pergamos and Thyatira, which also had mixed memberships. In those churches the unsaved members were in a minority, but at Sardis they were predominate. In Christ’s letter to the Sardian assembly, He stated that only a few of them had not defiled their garments and thus were worthy to walk with Him (Revelation 3:4).

When Christ visited the church body at Sardis, He said to them, *“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”* (Revelation 3:1c). He reached out to check their vital signs and, as the great Bible teacher Dr. Lehman Strauss once put it, “The Great Physician felt their pulse [and] pronounced them dead.” They had degenerated from holiness to phoniness.

Oh, the dreadful condition of being artificial! Many people know only the appearance and not the reality of Jesus Christ. Do *you* know the difference between appearance and reality? God does! In every generation He has had to pronounce this woe against certain ones: *“... These people draw near Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me ...”* (Isaiah 29:13).

Think of the excruciating eternal impact of being busy and active in the church—but ending up unknown by Jesus Christ! Is your heart in the same place that your mouth is saying you are? You talk and sing about the Lord, and perhaps even teach a class, but does your *heart* belong to Him?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Dear Lord Jesus, as You wrote this letter to the church at Sardis, You warned about the danger of those who professed something they never possessed. And while You were here on earth, one of Your constant emphases was dislodging people from a false sense of security—those who thought they were in the kingdom because they were Abraham’s seed, circumcised, going to the temple, sacrificing, giving, and serving—but had no heart for change. We pray that You would show us that the only true riches are in possessing Jesus Christ. To profess a knowledge of You, and yet to not possess that life-giving, life-changing, born-again relationship with You, is the most horrible deadly condition we could be in. Oh Lord, open our eyes to behold Your wonderful truths! Thank You for the blessing of Your Word! Let Your Spirit pierce our hearts with the assurance of true riches in Christ. We pray in the lovely name of Jesus, and for His glory. Amen.*

MONDAY: Professors Not Possessors

*“Remember ... how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent ...**”*
(Revelation 3:3a, emphasis added).

Jesus spared no words to convey His utter contempt for religious charlatans producing only the false fruits of self-righteousness. Perhaps the strongest warnings ever uttered in His earthly ministry came from the heart of the loving Savior whenever He came across phonies—the religious fakes, the “stuffed shirts,” the con-men and women with false pretenses who only appeared to be His. Some of His most graphic illustrations were about these Christian look-alikes.

Jesus warned: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Matthew 7:15). Such people live for their own desires—like animals.

Instead of loving and serving others, they “use them,” like objects, for their own gain. Jesus called them fruitless trees that were to be “*cut down and thrown into the fire*” (Matthew 7:19).

Jesus said that it does not matter whether you have made a profession, been circumcised, joined a church, or been baptized. None of those things really matter if you aren’t a genuine fruit-bearer for Christ. Are you bearing fruit? The evidence of salvation is not reassurance from your parents that you prayed for salvation as a little child, or someone else saying, “I remember when you went forward at that crusade, and you wrote it in your Bible.” You are a Christian and will go to heaven if the Spirit of God is bearing fruit in your life. When Jesus came and knelt beside the still and cold body of the church at Sardis and felt their pulse, He pronounced it dead.

Jesus pointed to the shocked church workers who never really knew Him personally: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father ...*” (Matthew 7:21). Fruit bearing is a result of a transformed heart, an internal prompting that longs to do the will of God. Though no child of God can perfectly or always do His will, there is an ever-growing desire that says: “No longer I, but Christ—not my will, but Yours be done.”

At the beginning of Matthew 13, through the story of the sower and the seed, Jesus compared the church to a grain field. The seed falling on the first three types of soil represents people who are not truly born again. Only the seed in the fourth type of soil represents one who will go to heaven. Some people bring forth a little fruit, some more; however, everyone who is born again produces fruit. You cannot get to heaven without salvation; this involves a true saving faith that changes your life and results in godly fruit.

When we lead people to Christ, we will know that they are really saved if they start bearing fruit. A lot of people *profess* Christ but do not *possess* Him. So in Matthew 13:30, Jesus tells us, “Let those who profess to love Me stay in the church. At the harvest, the judgment, they will be gathered up and burned.” His verdict: fire, judgment, and hell for those in the visible church who do not bear fruit.

Jesus says that those who profess Christ but do not possess Him, are like “fancy cups fouled with filth on the insides”: “*Woe to you ... hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside ... are full of extortion and self-indulgence ...*” (Matthew 23:25–26).

This is a damning sin. This is the person who measures everything by what it will do for himself—whether a job, relationship, or service. Jesus was talking about people who tithed and went to the temple every day. But He saw through their hypocrisy.

Jesus described such people as “*whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness*” (Matthew 23:27). Believers are filled with life that is endless, but lost people are walking coffins filled with death.

The wages of sin is death. There is a barrier between man and God—man’s refusal to acknowledge God’s prior claim to his life. Mankind is self-centered instead of God-centered. The Bible identifies this as rebellion, and calls it sin. Furthermore, the Bible declares that *the wages of sin is death*, but God offers a solution: ... *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our*

Lord (Romans 6:23). Through the gift of His only Son, whose death on the cross paid the penalty for man's sin and rebellion, *God went the limit*. Now comes your part.

Are you willing to admit that God is right when He says you have rebelled? Do you recognize your need of a personal relationship with God? Because Jesus took the penalty for your sins, trust God that He will forgive you and give you eternal life. Accept the Bible's invitation: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ...*" (Acts 16:31). The Bible also says that *if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). Simply speak to God and tell Him you want to change the direction of your sinful life by receiving Jesus. That is the repentance God wants to work in your life. Then confess Jesus as your Lord, and you will find true living hope for the end of days as He produces the fruit of His salvation in your life—His love, His joy, and His peace.

TUESDAY: Some Horrible Biographies

"... 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 3:3b, emphasis added).

These Sardians professed the truth without possessing Christ personally. God says that such hypocrites will face this final end: "*His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat [the fruit-bearing ones] into the barn [heaven]; but He will burn up the chaff [unsaved ones] with unquenchable fire [hell]*" (Matthew 3:12).

There are many Scripture writers who record horror stories of **false believers** who are called dogs, pigs, wolves, thistles, fire, and rotten fruit. All of these are destined for destruction:

- **The Cains** grow up near paradise, hearing about God from faithful parents, but do not choose to know the true God. They depart, and never look back at Jesus Christ. (Genesis 4)
- **The Esaus** sell an eternally valuable spiritual inheritance for a moment of fleshly desire. They find no place of repentance, and thus miss the heavenly city. (Genesis 25–38)
- **The Balaams** want to die the death of the righteous, but live the life of rebellion and greed. They, too, will be going to hell. (Numbers 22–24)
- **The Pharisees** face damnation because they live hygienically sterile lives, having an exterior holiness but corrupted and rotting hearts. (Matthew 23)
- **The Judases** live around Jesus for years, hearing and seeing Him daily, but inwardly they only grow colder and harder by the year. (John 19)

- **The modern-day liberal churches** are the dead, liberal, cold, and lifeless churches that keep the gospel in a coffin. But, alas, the Great Physician pronounces *them* dead!

Is it possible in this great era of the church that your heart is also cold, dark, and empty? In the cathedral of Lubeck, Germany, there is an engraving from the Middle Ages entitled “The Lament of Jesus Christ Against the Ungrateful World.” The engraving from that church wall, copied below, beautifully reflects our Lord’s teaching on this subject:

*Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us,
You call Me master and obey Me not,
You call Me light and see Me not,
You call Me the way and walk Me not,
You call Me life and live Me not,
You call Me wise and follow Me not,
You call Me fair and love Me not,
You call Me rich and ask Me not,
You call Me eternal and seek Me not,
If I condemn thee, blame Me not.*

Ponder this message today: God *hates* profession without possession. Beware if you are merely a pretender. The only one being fooled is you, not God. Stop and do what Paul advises in 2 Corinthians 13:5—examine yourself. Look for evidence that the Holy Spirit lives within your life. His presence brings love for God, spiritual hunger for the Word, a desire to repent from sin, a longing for holiness, and a genuine desire to serve and sacrifice for others.

WEDNESDAY: When Jesus Visits

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire ... (Revelation 1:14, emphasis added).

What did Jesus say to the assembly at Sardis? He told them, “I want you to meet with Me again. I am the Lord Jesus Christ, and I know everything about you.” Jesus stood by them, waiting for a pulse, saying, “You are in church, and appear to be alive, but when I check your pulse, there is no life.”

Jesus is all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever-present. He is the One who sees and knows all as He speaks to the churches; He is the One who holds their message, their witness, and their existence; and He is the One who stands by their lampstand.

Look again at verse 1 of Revelation 3: “*I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*” Note that Christ gives no approval to the Sardians. God won’t tolerate

phonies; nor will He tolerate mere caretaker-Christianity. His way is life, growth, and fruit—or nothing. They were dead; their deeds were incomplete. They were still reciting the creed, saying their prayers, but the fire was absent. Remember: *“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7c)!

Their deeds had not come to maturity; there was no fully formed fruit. They were dying in the bud, an unformed fruit dropping that was worm-eaten, stunted, and dying.

Jesus appealed: *“Be **watchful**, and **strengthen** the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. **Remember** therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast** and **repent** ...”* (Revelation 3:2–3, emphasis added).

Consider these five imperatives from the Lord of the Church:

1. **Be watchful.** The word “watchful” (*agrupneo* in Greek) that Jesus uses in Revelation 3:2 expresses the idea of “being wakeful, sleepless, as the watchfulness of one who is intent upon a thing.” It comes from two Greek words meaning “to chase sleep.”
2. **Strengthen that which remains.** The word “strengthen” is often in Paul’s writing. It means “buttress, build a strong support, get grounded.”
3. **Remember.** “Remember” (a present imperative) means “keep on remembering the Word of God.”
4. **Hold fast.** This basically means to “keep on, never stop, be not wavering, do not be on again and then off again.”
5. **Repent.** Repentance is the answer—the hope not only for the Sardians, but also for us today. Make a conscious choice to say no to sin by definitive action once and for all.

Our Lord called upon the few faithful at Sardis to be vigilant. He urged them to strive to strengthen and revive what remained, but was at the point of death. Sardis was conquered twice, which should serve as a warning to us to not be overconfident as Christians. No commandment appears more frequently in the New Testament than this: “Watch.” We must therefore be watchful, continually on guard, so that we don’t lose our first love.

THURSDAY: How to Defeat the Devil Daily

He who sins is of the devil For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8, emphasis added).

It has been said that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty”; similarly, it could be said that “eternal watchfulness is the price of salvation.” Watchfulness should be the constant attitude of the Christian life. ... *It is high time*, said Paul, *to awake out of sleep* ... (Romans 13:11). He exhorts: *Watch, stand fast in your faith, be brave, be strong* (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Watch out for the prowling lion—Satan: ... *The devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8). The Christian must constantly be on the watch against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-13). The history of Sardis had its vivid examples of what happens to the garrison whose watch is slack. As Christians, we likewise face continual attack by the powers that seek to seduce us from our loyalty to Christ. Often these attacks are subtle; therefore, we must be ever on guard. God expects us to resist or fight Satan. We are never to turn our backs on our battles; there is no defensive gear in the armor of God to cover our back-sides. Face the devil; resist him using the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, the armor, and prepared feet (Ephesians 6:14-18).

Watch out for the crouching monster of sin. In the Christian life there must be unceasing vigilance: “*Watch and pray*,” said Jesus, “*lest you enter into temptation* ...” (Matthew 26:41). Temptation waits for our unguarded moments and then attacks. Sin, however, is even worse than Satan. Satan is defeated, so all we have to do is this: (1) speak the Word of God; (2) resist; and (3) stand our ground. (See James 4:6-7.) But God says that sin is *so bad* that we must *run* or *flee* from it (2 Timothy 2:22), and then He will deliver us.

Watch out for the unexpected coming of Jesus. The New Testament repeatedly urges Christians to be on the watch for the coming of our Lord: “... *You do not know what hour your Lord is coming*. ... *What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*” (Matthew 24:42-43; Mark 13:37; 2 Thessalonians 5:6). In my own life, the greatest deterrent to sin is that I do not know when Jesus is coming. I stay watchful because I do not want Him to come and find me doing something that dishonors or displeases Him.

Watch out for your “last day.” No man knows the day and the hour when eternity will invade time for him. “The last day is a secret,” says Augustine, “that every day may be watched.” A man should live every day as if it were his last.

We must also avoid the permeating evil of false doctrine. The Christian must be on the watch against false teaching. In Paul’s last address to the elders of Ephesus he warned them that grievous wolves would invade the flock from without and within, and men would arise to speak perverse things. “Therefore,” said Paul, “watch!” (See Acts 20:29-31.)

Respond to the tireless eyes of Jesus. Never forget that even as we must watch for Jesus Christ, so Jesus Christ is watching us! “I have not found your works perfect,” said the risen Christ, “in the sight of my God” (Revelation 3:2). Christ is looking for something from us. We so often regard Him as the One to whom we look for things: His strength, His help, His support, His comfort. But we must never forget that He is looking for our love, our loyalty, and our service.

The things a man must do lie in his hand. This old saying is true: “Fate is what we must do; destiny is what we are meant to do.” The Christian does not believe in an inescapable fate, but he does believe in a destiny that he can accept or refuse.

Jesus Christ is looking for something *from* each of us, and there is something He wants done *by* each of us. Is there an area in your life that the Lord wants you to surrender? Is He leading you to give something of worth to someone else? Could He be leading you to spend more time with Him in prayer? Pray about the possibilities, and then make yourself readily available to however He leads.

FRIDAY: Living in Assurance

*“You have **a few** names even in Sardis who **have not defiled their garments;** and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy”* (Revelation 3:4, emphasis added).

Do you realize that we are to put on and wear Christ as our garment? For Christ said, *“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments”* (Revelation 3:5a). In Romans 13:14 we are told: *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.* So whenever you get dressed, ask yourself: *Would Jesus approve of what I am wearing?*

Evaluating in this manner should change the way some of us dress. Jesus does not want us to wear anything that would draw attention away from the holiness of God. Yet our culture does that all the time. The more you are conformed to today’s immodest culture, the more you will allow your body to dishonor God. As the beautiful hymn expresses below, every day we are wearing Christ, so we should consciously consider whether our clothing reflects all that He is to us as our righteous and holy Redeemer. As one great reformer wrote in his hymn, “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”:

*Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.
Bold shall I stand in thy great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am—
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.
Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all, a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.*

—Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf
Tr. by John Wesley

SATURDAY: Embrace Christ

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life
(1 John 5:12, emphasis added).

Know that Christ holds you: *“He who overcomes ... I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life ...”* (Revelation 3:5b). This does not indicate that we can lose our salvation. To have your name kept in the Book of Life means that you are saved. Can you lose your salvation? Scripture clearly says no! In Sardis, the king could blot you out if he did not like you, but not in the kingdom of God. True believers will never have their names blotted out.

A true believer does not practice sin; a counterfeit believer cannot help but practice sin, because he does not have God’s new nature within him. But these words were not written so that you and I might judge other people. The words were inspired so that we may examine ourselves. I exhort you to answer these questions honestly before God:

- Do I have the Holy Spirit within me, or am I merely pretending to be a Christian? In other words, am I merely professing rather than possessing new life in Christ?
- Do I cultivate my walk in the Spirit by daily Bible reading and prayer?
- Has any unconfessed sin defiled my inner person? Am I willing to confess and forsake it?
- Do I allow my old nature to control my thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule me? When temptation comes, do I “play with it” or flee from it? Do I immediately yield to the Spirit of God within me?
- Is there life and growth and fruit in my life—or nothing?

Warren Wiersbe once told a great story about a Sunday school teacher who was explaining the Christian’s old and new natures to a class of teenagers: “Our old nature came from Adam,” he explained, “and our new nature comes from Christ, who is called ‘the Last Adam.’” He had the class read 1 Corinthians 15:45: So also it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul.” The Last Adam became a life-giving spirit (NASB). “This means there are two ‘Adams’ living in me,” said one of the teenagers. “That’s right,” the teacher replied. “And what is the practical value of this truth?” The class was silent for a moment, and then a student spoke up. “This idea of the ‘two Adams’ really helps me in fighting temptation,” he said. “When temptation comes knocking at my door, if I send the first Adam to answer, I’ll sin. But if I send the Last Adam, I’ll get victory.” The life that is real is honest with God about these vital issues.¹

Make a choice to live in hope. Here is what living in hope is all about: “... *I will confess* [your] *name before My Father and before His angels*” (Revelation 3:5c). If you are a true believer, one day you will “be taken by the hand by the Lord Jesus, to be led up past the marshaled ranks of the angels, up along the golden boulevards of glory, up past the cherubim and the seraphim, up, up, to the Throne of God Himself and ... hear the Lord Jesus call you by your name and present you in person as His well beloved!”² Next, you will hear the Father saying, “Bring the best robe and put it on My child.” Picture it: a robe of white, bright as the day, and pure as the light (Romans 13:14).

When the Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mount, something happened not only to His countenance but also to His clothes. His raiment became white as the light. What a reward for faithfulness—to have a robe like that draped around your shoulders and to be invited to walk the shining ways of glory in light-transfigured clothes! Even Solomon in all his glory was never arrayed like one of these!

This week you have seen the way to know Christ more personally. Does He know your name? Are you robed in white? Wake up and be watchful! If you think that perhaps you have only been professing Christ, and not possessing Him, ask Him to convict your heart right now, and, as your holy Advocate, to argue for your righteousness by pleading His blood shed for you. If you have truly prayed in faith, thank Him that now He will be able to confess your name before His Father in heaven. Then, in these closing precious moments, let the Son of God enfold you with His Spirit and His love.

Week 19—Enjoy Christ's Approval

(Revelation 3:7–13—The Church at Philadelphia)

As the end of days approaches, you can find
hope as you enjoy Christ's approval!



SUNDAY: Flight 961 to Eternity

... You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James 4:14, emphasis added).

Thanksgiving Day, 1996: It was a typical flight—one that occurs thousands of times every day around the world. Ethiopian Air Flight 961 took off November 23, 1996, from Addis Ababa. Onboard were 163 passengers and twelve crewmembers. Among those flying that day were Mr. and Mrs. Andy Meakins. Andy, an elder at the International Evangelical Church of Addis, at one time pastored that large Bible-believing church. In less than two hours, more than 120 people died, including five from that church. Andy, a good friend of mine, did not survive the crash.

Somewhere near Kenya, the horrifying hijack began. Escaped convicts, brandishing an ax and a supposed bomb, stormed the flight deck, savagely beating the copilot and throwing him down. They then ordered the pilot to turn the plane eastward. In spite of the plane's dangerously low fuel tank, he was forced to submit to their demands. The pilot kept pleading for a refueling stop, but to no avail. The hijackers threatened to blow up the plane if he didn't comply. After trying to hug the coast of Africa, the pilot attempted to make it to the Indian Ocean island of Comoros. When it became evident they would not make it, the captain announced to the cabin passengers: "Listen, guys, we're all dead people. There is no argument now." "People began to scream," one witness said, "and others began to pray."

The crash is now well known: a Japanese honeymooning couple filmed the descent, dip of a wing, the flip, the crash, and the disintegration of the 767 over the water. News reports, however, never

contained what was in a fax to me from Andy Meakin's wife. This is what she told her church: "As soon as the captain told us we were going to crash I heard the distinct snap of my husband's seat belt. He was up and out of his chair. Going down the aisle row by row he earnestly shared the gospel of Christ with any who would listen. Before the sickening screech of twisting metal and the 110 mph crash of our plane into the water, Andy had signaled me that 20 passengers had trusted in Jesus for their salvation. Andy never made it back to the safety of his seat belt. But he took twenty souls with him to paradise."

You see, there was a safe spot in that plane—a shelter where no twisted wreckage could permanently harm—a haven that no crushing impact could erase. Andy knew and shared the divine directions with those souls being rushed into eternity: "God's directions are the only way to make it to happiness now and forever!" He knew how to escape the plane before it was too late for eternity. Do you know those directions? Are you following them? Are you sharing them with those whom God has placed around you?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Thank You, dear Father, for our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ who has written a letter to both the church at Philadelphia and us. This is perhaps the most important letter we could ever read in the world—for it expresses what those who will be good and faithful servants are doing during their earthly lives. How we long for Your approval! Do we have Your approval? If not, what can we do? How can we live? What can we invest our life's breath in that will lead to Your saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"? That is what we long to be. We want to have Your spiritual ears today to hear what You have to say. We want to be doers of Your Word, like Andy Meakins, and not just hearers. To that end we commit ourselves and pray with expectancy for You to illumine our hearts and quicken our wills that we might have Your approval. In the lovely name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Seeking Christ's Approval

"... **Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful** over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21, emphasis added).

The approval of those we love means so much, but there is an approval that far surpasses what anyone on earth can offer us. When our lives are over, our last breaths have been taken, and time has ceased to exist for us, all things on earth fade away quickly. In fact, as we weaken and approach death, the fading starts even before we die. At such a time, our thoughts ought to center more and more on the joy of seeing our beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and hearing Him say, "Well done!" Is that what you are living for?

We have come to Revelation 3:7–13, the sixth of seven letters our Lord Jesus wrote to seven literal, historic churches. Each church was given a powerful message from Christ. Each letter

closes with an application to all to *"hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Before we begin our study of this sixth letter, ask yourself: *Why did Christ not admonish this church for any error?* There are only two churches out of the seven that received the approval of Jesus—the assemblies at Smyrna and Philadelphia.

The reason for Christ's approval of those two churches is this: Smyrna was purified by obediently suffering persecution; Philadelphia was purified by obediently fulfilling God's commission and winning souls. Smyrna was triumphing through adversity; Philadelphia was ministering through opportunity. Smyrna was a suffering church; Philadelphia was a serving church. Smyrna was a church that stood alone; Philadelphia was a church that spoke out.

Like the Smyrnians, are you being purified as you obediently suffer persecution? Is God enabling you to triumph through adversity? Are you willing to stand alone for Christ in any situation? And are you, like the Philadelphians, obediently and joyfully telling people about Christ's offer of salvation? Are you ministering Christ to others in need? Do you speak out for Christ every chance you get?

Which of the six churches we've studied so far most represents your life right now? The two who received Christ's approval or the others who were subject to hearing His "I have this against you ..."?

I pray that you are longing for His approval—to hear His "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

TUESDAY: Real People in a Real Place

"... To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true ...'" (Revelation 3:7a, emphasis added).

Jesus wrote to the church at Philadelphia—a real place, with real people, experiencing real problems—to whom He offered real answers. Revelation 3:7 is the seventh time that the word "Philadelphia" is used in the New Testament. *Philadelphia* literally means "brotherly love." Hebrews 13:1 says, *Let brotherly love [Philadelphia] continue*. What a name! What a church that must have been back in the first century! And we are to be the same kind of church today—a church for God's glory!

Philadelphia was located thirty miles southeast of Sardis, on the road to Laodicea. The most striking historical note about the city was the very frequent tremors and earthquakes that were characteristic of their area. It had been destroyed by quakes several times. Fissures, ground cracks, volcanic activity in thermal pools, hot mud, and regular tremors were common. In fact, at times (sometimes even weekly) the Philadelphians would have to grab their tents and go live outside of the city to be safe from shocks, aftershocks, and bigger quakes.

The frequent tremors and quakes in Philadelphia help us to better understand Christ's words in Revelation 3:12: *"He who overcomes, I will make him a [stable] pillar in the temple of My*

God, and he shall go out no more." The saints at Philadelphia had seen everything dear to them devastated many times, but they had enduring safety in following Christ. For Jesus gave them a precious promise: "Live out My love in you, and someday you'll be safe with Me forever!"

The people of the assembly at Philadelphia realized, like those souls on Flight 961, that "the plane was about to crash"—the plane of this world, that is. Later on we will see just how bad the crash is going to be; but for now, we need to understand that at the end of the world one out of every two people will die a gruesome, unnatural death. There is no doubt about it: the world is headed for a devastating and deadly crash.

Before you are taken out of this world, you have the privilege of going up and down the aisles of this life to tell those who are afraid and lost how to find a permanent place of safety in Christ, our refuge. Are you willing to do that for them? For Jesus?

WEDNESDAY: Jesus Is Holy

"... I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on earth" (Leviticus 11:44, emphasis added).

What the Lord said in Leviticus has never changed. In fact, in Revelation 3:7 Jesus identified and introduced Himself as: "*He who is holy ...*" There is no doubt about it: Jesus wants to remind us that He, as God the Son, is the holy, eternal God of the universe—the *High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy ...* (Isaiah 57:15, emphasis added).

Although God is referring to dietary laws at the end of Leviticus 11:44, there are worse things than that which "*creeps on the earth.*" Many things on this earth defile us. In stark contrast, however, the preeminent feature of the character of God is holiness. Holiness is utter other-worldliness, a complete detachment from anything that is impure or unclean. There is a great gulf between what we are as fallen, defiled creatures and who God is in His eternal godhood. He is separate from all He has created, which is deteriorating. But God Himself is eternally self-existent; everything else derives its existence from Him.

Nothing will last forever that is not attached to God. When the tornado comes, the earthquake comes, or the plane is crashing, grab hold of that which will last forever: "*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). God says that He is holy, but we can dwell with Him. However, "*the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace,*" says my God, "*for the wicked*" (Isaiah 57:20-21).

The wicked are like the sea churning up mire and dirt, or an overflowing sewer ditch. But the holy infinite God of the universe says that if you are contrite, and humble yourself, He will bring you out of that ditch by His grace (Psalm 40:2) so that you can dwell with Him. That is the wonderful gospel! A miraculous gift!

When your life is almost over, and your last breath is about to be drawn, time will soon cease for you. As all things on earth are fading away, may the words of this fourth stanza of the old hymn, “Rock of Ages,” represent your prayerful spirit as you enter eternity.

*While I draw my fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

—Augustus M. Toplady, 1740-1778

THURSDAY: Jesus Is the Truth

*... The Son of God 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, emphasis added).*

There is a lot of doctrine in that verse. Jesus is God, and our source of eternal life. John is particularly fond of that word “true.” Paul describes the end of the age as a time of lawlessness and deception, but Jesus Christ is declared to be holy and true. When lawlessness surrounds us, He who is holy keeps His children safe; when deception abounds, there is One who is Truth.

Look at how Jesus introduced Himself to the church at Philadelphia: “*He who is holy, **He who is true**, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*” (Revelation 3:7, emphasis added). The word for “true” in that verse is very specific. In Greek there are two words for true: *alethes* and *alethinos*. *Alethes* denotes the reality of the thing; that which is “true to fact.” For example, “Hitler led Germany” is true to fact, but the *truth* is that he led them in error. *Alethinos* denotes “true” in the sense of “real, ideal, genuine.”¹ The Greek word for “true” in Revelation 3:7, thus means “genuine truth”; Jesus Christ *is* Truth. When you confront Him face-to-face, you are facing Truth Himself, and not merely true statements. As John MacArthur has said, “There is no substitute for God, and Jesus Christ is the genuine reality of God.”

Jesus has the key of David. Except for Revelation 3:7, the only other place “*the key of David*” appears in the Word of God is in Isaiah 22. At that time, King Hezekiah was on the throne of Israel, and 185,000 Assyrian enemy soldiers were on their way. These fierce warriors had their tents, chariots, and all their battle gear with them; they covered a vast territory, which greatly intimidated the Israelites. But Hezekiah came out on the wall of the city, looked at all those Assyrian warriors, got down on his knees, and asked God to defeat them. That night, God sent one angel and killed them all!

What is this “key of David”? In Isaiah 22, the city of Jerusalem was weak; its walls were broken down, but its people had not even looked to their Maker for help. God said that He would therefore find a faithful servant through whom He would work. Shebna, the unfaithful steward of the king, had an unrepentant heart and was judged; but God found Eliakim to be a faithful servant, so he was entrusted with the royal authority of God to speak. In other words, God said, “I will give My authority to Eliakim.” In Revelation 3:7 Jesus was saying, “That is what I am like. I am the faithful Son of God who has been entrusted with the authority of God.” He continued, “If I open a door of ministry for you, no one can shut it. If I close a part of your life, no one can open it. You should trust My authority.”

The “*key of David*” is all about Christ’s authority. After Jesus healed the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda, people were so excited about His authority to heal that they gathered around Jesus and were willing to listen to Him speak: “... *He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me [Jesus has the key of authority] has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. ... The hour is coming ... when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live*” (John 5:24–25).

In that passage, Jesus is saying that all of us are dead, but if we can hear His voice, we can come alive. We are born spiritually dead and spiritually blind: “*For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*” (John 5:26–29).

That resurrection has many parts. In 1 Corinthians 15:20–24, Paul speaks of multiple resurrections. There are resurrections that we will also be a part of in which the dead in Christ will rise first, and get their celestial bodies; those who are still alive will be caught up together with them, so both groups go up together. Jesus has all authority and judgment given to Him; this is the “*key of David*”—the authority of Christ; His voice can thus speak and the dead will rise.

What the people were when they went in the grave will reveal what they will be forever. If they went into the grave clothed with sin, they will be condemned to hell. Every time I think of that dreadful sentencing, I am so grateful that, though I am a sinner, I shall not die in my sins! My sins are gone and will never be remembered by God because Jesus, in His mercy, tenderly forgave me. I hope you know that to be true in your own life as well! For Jesus has said, “*I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death*” (Revelation 1:18).

FRIDAY: Doing What Jesus Wants

*“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for **you** have a little strength, **have kept My word, and have not denied My name**”*
(Revelation 3:8, emphasis added).

What did Jesus approve of in the church at Philadelphia? In Revelation 3:8 Christ shows us what He commends.

Holiness: “He who is holy” said to them, “I am intimately acquainted with your deeds, and they are pleasing to Me.” How can God be pleased with what we do? By our being holy, as He is holy. That means agreeing with God, being clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and responding to the Holy Spirit by saying YES to Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful thing to walk in holiness, in the power and energy of His Spirit, accomplishing the life of Jesus Christ here on earth.

Disciple-Making and Evangelism: Jesus commended the Philadelphians, “I have given you great opportunities that you have taken and fulfilled. I have put before you an open door, and no one can shut it.” This is disciple-making and evangelism. All of us are supposed to be doing that. Like my friend, Andy Meakin, we are on a plane that is crashing, so it is time to undo our seat belts and share the gospel with as many as we can.

Do you know what today's church does? The captain has announced over His intercom that our plane is crashing! Instead of undoing our seat belts, and jumping up to rescue people for eternity, we are pulling out our personal VCRs and playing a movie because “we are going to heaven.” Everybody else can go to hell. Do you get the metaphor? It is very dangerous to think that if we send our money for someone else to evangelize, we are all right because we did our part. No, God says that we are all to be disciple-makers. We need to get out of our seats and start walking the aisles of life urgently telling people about Jesus. Jesus praised the Philadelphians for going through that open door.

Dependence: Jesus told them, “I know you are weak and leaning on My power because you have little strength.” This is dependence. We are all supposed to be weak in this manner—knowing that we are ineffective apart from God's power. For Jesus has said, “... *without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

I often hear excuses for not witnessing, such as: “I'm too afraid to share the gospel”; “People might laugh at me”; or “I might be asked a question I don't know the answer to.” When ideas like that pop into your head, resist them and tell Jesus, “I don't want to be apart from You. I want to depend on You and Your power.” If you are asked a question you do not know how to answer, be honest, and say, “I don't know the answer to that question, but I do know this: I am going to heaven; are you?” You do not have to be a great Bible scholar to witness. Just let people know that when the plane crashes they are going to die. Did you know that Jesus talked more about hell than He did about heaven? Are you ready? Are you willing to find out if others you come in contact with are ready?

Obedience: Jesus told the saints at Philadelphia, “I know you are devoting yourselves to My Word, and have kept it.” This is obedience, which gives proof of our love for Christ, for He has said, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*” (John 14:15).

Commitment: Jesus said to the Philadelphians, “I know you love Me so much that you magnify My name unashamedly, and have not denied My name.” This is commitment. There is passive and active denial. Active denial is like getting up and flat out saying, “I don't believe in Christ”; passive denial is simply remaining quiet about Jesus and any relationship with Him.

When I was a student at Michigan State University, a professor walked into the class of about 500, looked us over, and smiled as he said: “This semester we are going to talk about the mythology of the Bible. Some of you have been taught to believe that thing. I am going to teach you it is not true. You don’t have to be bound by that weakness.” He was very effective, and then he asked if we had any questions about the mythology of the Bible. Since I did not know any better, I raised my hand and stated: “I believe the Bible is true—and it is not mythology.” He just pointed at me, and everyone started laughing and snickering. He made his point silently: “There! Look at the dinosaur. A relic from the past sits among you!”

That professor never did answer me; he only said, “We will talk about the mythology of the Bible this semester.” Afterward, fifty students who said they were Christians came up to me and asked if I would help them start a campus Bible study that semester. Be committed! Raise your flag at work, at home, at school. Even if you are scared to death, speak out! When you are weak, the Lord promises to make you strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

If speaking out for Christ is what He likes in someone, shouldn’t we be seeking those pursuits in place of others that crowd Him out? God gives the same promises to us as He did the Philadelphian assembly.

Victory over God’s Enemies: *“Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you”* (Revelation 3:9). Not even the gates of hell can withstand the attack. This is representative of the historic Philadelphian church of great outreach (approximately A.D. 1800-1950) when they went all over the world with the gospel through men like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Jonathan Goforth, C. T. Studd, and D. L. Moody. Although that zeal for spreading the gospel seems to now be a relic in a museum, Jesus still promises: “I will give you victory over your enemies—if you will just go.”

Deliverance from the Tribulation: *“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). This is referring to the Great Tribulation, and is a promise that the church will be delivered out of the world.

In Luke 18:8, Jesus says, *“When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”* He wonders: “There are so many people caught up with chasing after stuff that I am not sure they are really in My kingdom!” Are you chasing after the pleasures that this world brings—or after Christ, who is to be your greatest joy?

SATURDAY: Approved!

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Revelation 3:12, emphasis added).

Like Smyrna, the church at Philadelphia received no criticism from Christ due to laxity or disobedience. Smyrna was the suffering church; Philadelphia was the soul-winning church.

As vital as these words to the churches must have been 2,000 years ago, so they are to us today. Thus, we need to listen to what Christ has to say in these powerful appeals.

Be watchful—no quitting is allowed: “Behold, I come quickly!” (Revelation 3:11a). We need to heed Paul’s call to finish the race to the very end: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7). God intends that we race all the way to the end of life, and not simply walk the last lap. There is no such thing as retirement from serving the kingdom of God. From all the New Testament metaphors of races, finish lines, rewards, and crowns, it appears that how you *end* is how you will be rewarded!

Be diligent—no coasting is allowed: “Hold fast what you have” (Revelation 3:11b). Paul gives a call to life-long spiritual growth: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). No coasting is allowed in life; we ought to be found doing what we were left here to do.

Be cautious—no self-indulgence is allowed: “... that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11c). How can we lose our crown? By becoming disqualified. Self-discipline is a fruit of God’s Spirit; we must not give in to laxity and self-indulgence. It used to be in Israel that they had boundary stones that marked off inheritances. God always condemned moving the ancient boundary stones. Do you know what the church has started to do? We don’t set boundaries by saying we will not participate in anything that God hates (like watching bloodshed, seeing iniquity, nudity, immorality, and witchcraft). Instead we say that we are careful not to see *too much* of what God hates, or stay *too close* to what He has condemned. Beware of becoming conformed to the ways of this falling world.

One of the most glaring Christian sins today is self-indulgence. We live in a world where people are suffering horribly, and yet we indulge ourselves. We spend too much of our time being beautiful and pampered. Paul who was probably the greatest born-again Christian who ever walked the face of the earth, said, *I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul did not want to “step out of his lane” in the race and get disqualified. He was intent on finishing the course well. God always counts how we finish—not just how we start!

Christ offers true believers an *inescapable destination* with wonderful promises. Look at Revelation 3:12 again: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God [**security**], and he shall go out no more [**stability**]. And I will write on him the name of My God [**eternal life**] and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God [**purity**]. And I will write on him My new name [**intimacy**]” (emphasis added).

To the earthquake-weary citizens of Philadelphia, weak and insecure, Christ gave permanence. As for us, we can be *pillars* in the end of days because we are *secure* in Him. Have you lost your treasures on earth to disasters? Have you lost your loved ones to death? Have you lost your dreams to unexpected changes? If so, then you know there is nothing better than stability: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ... I go to prepare a place

for you. And ... I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1–3).

We are given an intimate name because we are a love gift from the Father to the Son (John 17:24). That means we are adopted: *and if children, then ... heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ...* (Romans 8:17). To those who have confessed Christ, Jesus promises: *"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels"* (Revelation 3:5).

Make a choice to live in hope. We need to listen to Jesus *today*. For He has said, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Revelation 3:13). Do you have hearing ears? Are you saved and listening to Jesus?

- A cold wave cooled the loving passion of the **Ephesians**. Watch out! Don't catch cold.
- Tribulation and poverty tempted and tried to discourage the **Smyrnians**. Watch out! Don't be discouraged.
- False doctrine and impurity tripped up some **Pergamites**. Watch out for imitations and immorality.
- False teachers and wickedness killed the **Thyatirans**. Watch out for truth and purity—not lies and deceit.
- Lifelessness robbed the **Sardians** of the Name. Watch out! Be sure you are clothed with Christ. Born-again believers will listen to Jesus, overcome, and be crowned.
- An open door stood before the **Philadelphians**, and they stepped through by faith. Watch out for open doors of ministry. Serve Christ for eternal rather than temporal gain.

I wonder: Do you know that the plane is crashing? This world is headed to a very abrupt conclusion. Think about the people you love: your family, friends, coworkers, classmates, and neighbors. If they don't know Jesus Christ, do you mind that they are going to a place of blackness of darkness where worms do not die and there will be endless fire? Does it matter to you? Jesus wants you to unashamedly go forth and tell them about Him!

Oh, how I pray that you earnestly desire the blessing of Christ's approval, and therefore covet hearing His "Well done!"

Week 20—Heed Christ’s Request

(Revelation 3:14–22—The Church at Laodicea)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope
as you heed Christ’s request!



SUNDAY: Welcome to Laodicea

*“I know your works, that **you are neither cold nor hot**. I could wish you were cold or hot” (Revelation 3:15).*

Laodicea has the grim distinction of being the only assembly of the seven that the Lord of the church did not commend in some way. It is the only church Christ warned: He said He would take away their lampstand and snuff them out if they did not repent and follow Him. This is the seventh historic church, and the seventh type of Christian. It also represents the final era of Christ’s church (from about 1950 onward), and is perhaps today’s most prevalent church type—contented here and not looking for the heavenly city there.

Let’s look again at the facts about Revelation, which is divided into three parts by the author (1:19): Christ is gloriously unveiled (Chapter 1); Christ confronts His church (Chapters 2–3); and Christ conquers the world (Chapters 4–22).

If you recall, in the curse at the fall of Satan, Adam relinquished his dominion in this world, but when Jesus Christ came, He took back what the “*prince of the power of the air*” had usurped. Our sovereign and omnipotent God has always been in control, but to suit His own perfect purposes, He has permitted sin to run rampant throughout the centuries. However, starting in chapter four of Revelation, Christ will conquer evil and take it all back forever.

Now let’s focus again on the letters to the churches; each letter has six parts:

1. **Assembly**—seven separate and distinct churches (Laodicea, in this week’s lesson).
2. **Author**—Jesus Christ, who identified Himself in a unique way through His names.

3. **Approval**—what the assembly was doing right (except for Laodicea).
4. **Admonition**—what they were doing wrong.
5. **Appeal**—to follow Christ faithfully.
6. **Assurance**—granted if they responded rightly to Christ.

Revelation 2–3 reveals what Christ said to the seven churches, a select group in a circular loop. His message to them speaks across the centuries to us today.

- **Ephesus**, the careless church, left their first love. Christ said to them, “Come back to Me!”
- **Smyrna**, the crowned church, suffered persecution. Christ said to them, “Be faithful to the end!”
- **Pergamos**, the compromising church, tolerated evil. Christ said to them, “Separate yourselves!”
- **Thyatira**, the corrupted church, joined the world. Christ said to them, “Divorce yourself from the world!”
- **Sardis**, the feeble church, wasn’t on guard. Christ said to them, “Wake up before it is too late!”
- **Philadelphia**, the faithful church, was pleasing to God. Christ said to them, “Keep on keeping on!”
- **Laodicea**, the foolish church, needed nothing. Christ said to them, “Find what you need in Me!”

Note that what He said to the seven churches also applies to individual Christians. Therefore, I exhort you to ask the Lord Jesus to apply His letter to the seventh church to your own heart!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, I pray that You would open, illumine, and powerfully minister Your Word to our hearts. If there is any coldness, blindness, nakedness, or spiritual poverty in our lives that is unnoticed, or that we are not concerned about, may You, Lord Jesus, make it so evident to us that we will be as sickened about it as You are. Before You vomit in Your displeasure, help us to repent and get rid of those things that grieve You. Oh Lord Jesus, thank You for this last letter to the church at Laodicea as well as Your other six glorious letters to the churches. Thank You for the privilege of immersing ourselves in Your Word! May we never grow tired or indifferent to the privilege of being in Your Word, but always come expectant of the blessing that You promised would come from the reading and hearing of the Scriptures. We pray in Your precious name, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

Monday: Sounds Like Life in the U.S.A.

... *Let him who thinks he stands **take heed** lest he fall* (1 Corinthians 10:12, emphasis added).

When you step back and look at where the church of Laodicea was geographically, culturally, and historically, it sounds ominously like American life in the twenty-first century. There are some powerful insights we can draw from this ancient city. As you read through each of the following points, think about the similarities to our society, and perhaps even to your own life.

The Laodiceans were wealthy. Laodicea was the wealthiest of all the cities—a very rich banking and commercial center located thirty miles southeast of Philadelphia. Her great wealth produced an independent spirit; even His church boasted of having no needs, not even for God. Jesus therefore said that He would vomit them out of His mouth “*Because [they] say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—’*” (Revelation 3:17a). Christians always get drawn into the culture around them, yet Jesus wants us to be separate from it. We are to be *in* the world, but not *of* it. We must not allow ourselves to be squashed into the world’s mold. Because the Laodicean church was conformed to the world, they felt they did not need God. *Beware of the subtle dangers of wealth.*

The Laodiceans were self-sufficient—like the kings of Israel who trusted in their armies, neglected to call on God, and were sadly defeated. God stirred up enemies from all directions to march on Jerusalem; then He would wait to see what Israel would do. God does not want us to neglect coming to Him for our needs. In less wealthy parts of the world, the Christians pray that God will move in their lives, and do great and mighty things. However, in more affluent areas, some believers get conformed by the world to plan everything themselves. *Beware of trusting in riches—lest it be God that is neglected.*

The Laodiceans were fashionable. The city was a renowned center for clothing. They raised sheep that produced glossy jet-black wool that was woven into a garment called a “trimita.”

These garments were much in demand, and a source of great income. They were so proud of their clothing! But Jesus said, “[You] *do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—*” (Revelation 3:17b). For that reason Jesus said to them, “I counsel you that you are so proud of your clothes, but you need to come to Me and get real clothing.” *Beware of staying in step with everyone but God.*

The Laodiceans were worldly. By following the fashion trends of this world, many Christians have forgotten that God’s primary calling is for us to be a walking temple of God. When entering a shrine or a temple in the Middle East, visitors are required to wear the proper covering. You see, even the pagans, the apostates, and the godless realize that a temple is to be kept reverently holy. Yet the walking temples of the infinite God of the universe, whose name is holy, are often defiled—all in the name of what is “fashionable.”

Women, especially, need to be aware that the eyes of men are never satisfied. In 2 Peter 2:14 men are described as *having eyes full of adultery*. Ladies, you should never want to be in any

man's adulterous imagination. *Beware of focusing on externals and keeping up with the culture—lest you forget God.*

The Laodiceans were insecure. The city was truly indefensible and vulnerable because it had no water supply; thus, just to keep the peace, it sought to never offend anyone. In the ancient world, there were only three things necessary for an inhabitable city: dependable water, food supplies, and security. The Laodiceans' hearts toward God were like their water supply from an aqueduct that brought water in from the city of Colosse: not hot or cold—merely lukewarm (Revelation 3:15–16). *Beware of finding security in anything but God.*

The Laodiceans were compromisers. They were non-confrontational; they always looked for the middle ground. This is what is happening in our religious world today. People are seeking to build a visible unity in the church of Jesus Christ, but that will never happen. Jesus said this type of unity can only take place spiritually among those who are blood-bought. Many long to have the biggest gathering and political clout because they desire to change the morals of the world. But Christendom has largely forgotten that this only transpires through right doctrine. Thus, to avoid divisiveness, holding fast to right doctrine has been replaced by stressing love, joy, and external things. That is what ecumenicalism is all about. Almost every major constituent group of Christianity is caving in and signing peace agreements with heretical and apostate groups. Who will we evangelize then? *Beware of seeking peace to the point of compromise—lest it be God who is offended.*

The Laodiceans were health conscious. Laodicea was a center for medical discoveries and advancements, especially in the temple of Carian. They developed a special antiseptic eye salve called "kollurion" that could heal infections, and was highly sought after. The salve was not exported; people came from far and wide to get it and, as a result, Laodicea became a resort city. People would spend a fortune for the privilege of using the salve to cure their eye problems. But Jesus told them, "You do not know that you are blind!" They were so trusting in their medicine that they felt perfectly able to care for their sight. Spiritually, however, they were totally blind.

How long has it been since you have personally seen Jesus in His Word? You cannot depend on great preachers on radio and television, the latest Christian books, or Christian videos or CDs. How long has it been since you have personally opened His Word and seen the glory of God on every page? Many men cannot spiritually lead their families because they cannot open the Bible and see anything in it. Men, you just need to come to the Lord and ask for His eye salve: *Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law* (Psalm 119:18). *Beware of keeping only your body healthy, and not your soul.*

The Laodiceans were spiritually insensitive. Today's church at large is in the same condition. Friends I went to college with have told me that they don't have Sunday evening church services anymore because our world is running too fast, and they cannot generate enough excitement to get people to come. *We cannot generate excitement—but God can.* We need to get people excited about reading and studying God's Word! *Beware of depending on human progress—lest it be God's hand that is ignored.*

Currently, in medical fields and even in ministry, you need protective gear to protect yourself from biohazard contamination. Yet the most precious part of your body, your soul, is being exposed to deadly contagions that will make you sick spiritually. The light and the luster of this world cannot help but cause God and His delights to get dimmer and dimmer.

So then, a wealthy, commercial, peace-seeking, medically advanced city called Laodicea was the home of the assembly that received Christ's seventh letter to the churches. Did its lack of character remind you of what is happening in America in the twenty-first century? How about in your own life? Is all well between you and the Lord? If you are a born-again Christian, and you can't see something of value in God's Word, then you need to look at what is ruining your eyesight. If that is your situation, I exhort you to get right with Him today!

TUESDAY: Jesus Is the Greatest!

*"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 ...**'"*
(Revelation 3:14, emphasis added).

Laodicea was the foolish church. They needed nothing, not even God. Therefore, Christ said to them, "Find what you need in Me!" As we look at what we find in Christ, we will see that He reveals Himself in three ways. As you study them with me, I hope that you will conclude, as I have, that *Jesus is the greatest!* Now discover what we can learn about Christ in Revelation 3:14.

Jesus is the Amen. "Amen" is a word put at the end of a solemn statement affirming its truth. Jesus Himself *is* Truth; thus, He is God's last word to man. Therefore, we ought to listen to Him. This is what the writer of Hebrews says so beautifully: ... *who being in the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, **sat down** at the right hand of the Majesty on high ...* (Hebrews 1:3, emphasis added).

In the tabernacle and the temple there were no chairs or benches. The priests were constantly on the move making sacrifices, lighting and maintaining lamps, and shuffling the showbread. They were never done, and could never sit down. But Jesus, our High Priest, offered Himself only once, and then sat down. He is "*the Amen*"—God's last word!

Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness. Only Jesus explains God, for *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him* (John 1:18). Because only Jesus explains God, we must believe in Him. Many of today's preachers and theologians no longer believe that Jesus is the only way to God. We should not be alarmed, though. The apostle Paul warned his apprentice in the faith, young Timothy the pastor, about this danger: *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons* (1 Timothy 4:1). We must not leave the Word of God for the sake of compromise and peace: Jesus is the only way to God.

Jesus is the “Beginning of the creation of God.” This does not mean that Jesus was God’s first creation. Rather, it means that He is the Creator, the origin, the source. He is the Creator God who began all other creations: *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made* (John 1:3). Now look at this wonderful description of Christ, which I dearly love: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him* (Colossians 1:15–16).

When the ancients used to do mathematics, they did it opposite of us. We write down numbers in a column, and put the answer at the bottom. The ancients put the answer at the top because that is better than all the combined elements. They called this the *prototokos*—“the thing above all the rest.” That is the name Jesus was given: Creator, God the Son. I hope you agree with me that *Jesus is the greatest!*

WEDNESDAY: They Didn’t See Christ

*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; **nor can he know them**, because they are spiritually discerned* (1 Corinthians 2:14, emphasis added).

Did you notice Christ’s commendation to this church? There is none! Any good word is grimly missing in His letter to the Laodiceans. They were tepid, thoroughly evangelical, but not *evangelistic*. Tepid is the condition where conviction does not touch one’s conduct, heart, or decisions. Tepid is when the cross brings delight as an ornament but not a grisly, painful reminder of how we must die to our self, flesh, and pleasures daily. Jesus said, *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23 RSV). That was His call to those following Him faithfully as His disciple.

The church at Laodicea had facilities (probably paid for), programs, budgets that were filled, and respect in the community. However, they lacked humility, contrition, depth of prayer, and passion for the lost. Worship to them was simply another service rather than a personal longing poured out to God.

In Isaiah there is a passage written like a miniature portrait of the whole Bible: *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand* (Isaiah 64:6–8).

That is an indictment of us today. In my ministry experience, the number-one sin that saints struggle with is getting anything out of the Word of God. We need to cultivate a burning passion

for the Word, and cool our passion for the world (entertainment, health, exercise, finances, hobbies, and our children's advancement).

The Laodicean church didn't see Christ, and He is also hiding His face a great deal today because of our misplaced values. We ought to value knowing God, and leading our families to know and seek Him, rather than fashion, success, sports, and riches. Many parents want their children to attend the top schools to become professionals, but that is a worldly desire. What if, as they go to that high-status school, they lose their faith and never return to God's church? I would rather have a poor, but righteous, eighth-grade graduate than a graduate from a prestigious university who mocks God.

Do you see Christ moving in your life? Or is He hiding His face from you because of misplaced values? Have you examined your priorities in light of God's Word? To whom have you given first place in your life? If any of this hits home with you, ask the Lord to give you a burning passion for His Word—and to cool your passion for the world!

THURSDAY: A Geography Lesson

*"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—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 3:15–18, emphasis added).*

This is the heartbeat of the letter to the Laodicean assembly—Christ's admonition, or accusation: "You are lukewarm; you needed nothing, so I will spit you out!" What an incredible contrast to His "Well done!"

A Spiritual Lesson from Geography: The setting was graphic. Colosse (Colossians), which was known for pure, cold, crystal clear waters that spring up, was six miles away. Hierapolis, with its hot springs steaming up from the ground, was also close at hand. Because there was no water available in Laodicea, they built an aqueduct from Colosse, but by the time their water traveled six miles it was never cold, only lukewarm. Hence the apt description Jesus gave to this church in Revelation 3:15–18 above.

Christ wanted the Laodiceans to either be like a cold drink that refreshes or like a hot bath that cleanses and renews. But they were not to compromise by striving to live between both worlds—and hence become uselessly lukewarm.

A Spiritual Warning from Jesus: Here is an insight to ponder: perhaps the borrowed, lukewarm, secondhand water was a portrait of borrowed, secondhand Christianity. They were not

getting the water themselves out of the Rock; they relied on others. *Secondhand Christianity is a curse.*

Do you drink daily of Christ's living water? Or does someone have to give you a bottle? Do you feed on the manna of God's Word? Or does someone have to spoon-feed you? Is your experience of the transforming divine power in salvation secondhand or personal? Watch out if your salvation is not zestfully and hotly and personally yours. If you do not repent, Christ will have to chasten you even to the point of weakness, sickness, or death (see 1 Corinthians 11:30).

That was Christ's appeal to the Laodiceans, which showed the heartbeat of His love. The lesson: He does not immediately write us off; He always pleads with us. Note what He has to say in Revelation 3:18.

Revelation 3:18a: *"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich"* How do rich people buy gold from Christ? In two ways: suffering and giving. Jesus loves our suffering and giving. Exchange the treasures of this world for heavenly treasures. Jesus exhorts us: *"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 10:39). If you want to lose something, hold on to it. If you want to gain something, give it away. Have open hands for Christ.

Revelation 3:18b: *"I counsel you to ... [get] white garments, that you may be clothed"* Seek Christ. Remember those black garments called "trinitas"? Get rid of those things. Jesus wants us to get white garments from Him: *Put on [the Lord Jesus Christ—His] tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering ... and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts"* (Colossians 3:12; Romans 13:14).

Revelation 3:18c: *"... that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed"* What is this? What we are going to wear in eternity is what we wear on earth: *"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). Every saint will be happy and rejoice in heaven, but there will be levels of rewards; we will not all be equal there. So we need to seek Christ with all our hearts here. It is not the length of time we serve that matters, but the depth of our passion for Him. Start living today for how you want to end the race!

Revelation 3:18d: *"... and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see"* Simply put: study God's Word!

How incredibly Christ loves! In spite of their unbelief and unconcern, even to them He made these appeals. If you are a Laodicean Christian, He is calling out to you as well: "Come back to Me. I love you!"

FRIDAY: Six Steps to True Joy

*"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, **that you may be rich ...**"*
(Revelation 3:18).

Jesus says, "Give Me your treasures—I advise you to buy from Me." Scripture tells us that *All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ... That the genuineness of [our] faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ... when [He has] tried [and purified us] we will come forth as gold* (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:7; Job 23:10 NAS). What is all this about? It is Christ saying: "Remember Laodicea's riches. Without enduring suffering there is no possession of lasting riches." What is the gold? It is faith refined by suffering.

Jesus sets forth six steps to true joy.

- 1. Seek real clothing from Christ.** He counsels us to put on His "white garments" (3:18a). We are to *pursue ... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14b). We are to *be clothed with humility* (the root of all virtues), for *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"* (1 Peter 5:5). Christ is saying that whoever pursues holiness possesses eternal life.
- 2. Plan for the ultimate day** *"... that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed ..."* (3:18b). As Paul says, *... Each of us shall give account of himself to God ... For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, ... whether good or bad* (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Start thinking today about the final moment of your earthly life when you will explain to Jesus what you did with your days.
- 3. Study to know Christ:** *"... Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see"* (3:18c). Paul was sent to open the eyes of those who were still in darkness (Acts 26:18). Jesus said that men who love darkness hate the light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Without needed awakening there is no entrance into spiritual sight.
- 4. Learn where Christ is taking you:** *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten"* (3:19a). Yield to Him. See how much He loves even His wayward children: *"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives"* (Hebrews 12:6).
- 5. Return to Christ from wandering:** *"... Be zealous and repent"* (3:19b). Return to Christ! Like the prodigal's father, Jesus waits to receive us, forgive us, welcome us, clothe us anew, and feast with us. He only waits for us to look up from the "pigpen of life" and think of Him!
- 6. Commune with Christ daily.** He beckons: *"... 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"* (3:20). What a precious invitation!

Those who lived in the ancient world usually had three meals. In the morning, they had *akratisara*—bread dipped in wine; at noonday, they had *ariston*—a snack eaten at work, or on the roadside; the word *deipnon*, used for “dine” in verse 20, refers to the evening meal, the main meal of the day—a time for lingering over the meal after a long day’s work.

Jesus is standing at the door of your heart, waiting for you to invite Him in to linger in fellowship as your Lord and Savior throughout your life. Remember Holman Hunt’s famous picture of Christ standing at the door knocking; the handle of salvation is on *your* side, lost friend; the handle of fellowship is on *your* side, Christian.

SATURDAY: Intimacy Assures

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:12, emphasis added).

Amazingly, true believers can actually have intimacy with God: “*To him who overcomes [a true believer] I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne*” (Revelation 3:21). Wow! Did you really catch what He was saying? And look at what He offers:

- **Intimacy is a promise:** “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him*” (John 14:21).
- **Intimacy is a Person:** “*... This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (John 17:3)
- **Intimacy is permanent:** “*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son*” (Revelation 21:7).

Make a choice to live in hope. What impression are you leaving with others? Jesus’ appeal to each of us is to heed His request for intimacy by turning our eyes upon Him to linger long in His presence! Oh, look full in His wonderful face! Looking at and longing for the world will only make you His enemy; but intimacy with Christ is the greatest treasure you can ever have on this earth!

Helen H. Lemmel (1864–1961), the blind hymn writer, gave us this beautiful song. I invite you to turn your eyes fully upon your precious Jesus as you sing the words to this great song. Its chorus packs a powerful message for today’s church!

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!*

*Thro' death into life ever-lasting
He passed, and we followed Him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion—
For more than conq'rors we are.*

*His word shall not fail you—He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!*

*Chorus: Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.¹*

—Helen H. Lemmel, 1864–1961

Week 21—Adore Christ's Loveliness

(Revelation 4)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you adore Christ's loveliness!



SUNDAY: Adoring the Loveliness of Jesus

Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will see the land that is very far off
(Isaiah 33:17, emphasis added).

Revelation is one of the few books that has a divinely inspired outline. Look at God's outline in 1:19: "Write the things which you have seen [chapter 1], and the things which are [chapters 2–3], and the things which will take place *after this* [chapters 4–22]" (emphasis added).

Revelation 4 marks the beginning of our Lord Jesus Christ's conquering back of the cosmos. As this chapter opens, we step into the worship center of the universe. By faith, gaze at the One seated on the eternal throne. Exalt God in your spirit for the endless praise ascending around His throne. Be still and know who it is before whom you stand. Adore the *loveliness of Jesus as* the center and focus of your worship. See Christ in all His resplendent beauty, for He alone is worthy of all worship and all praise!

To worship Jesus is our duty and purpose for existence. In fact, the amount of time we spend worshipping Christ reveals His true "worthship" to us. True worship is to ascribe to Him the honor, praise, glory, and majesty of which He is worthy. This day, stand with me in the vestibule and peer through the door into the chambers of the Most High God!

Adoring the loveliness of Jesus fills the entire fourth chapter of Revelation in which we see the awesome Sovereign Lord on the throne (vv. 1–3, 5); the awesome scene around the throne (vv. 4, 6–7); and the awesome song before the throne (vv. 8–11).

That faithful and true disciple of love, the lone heir of the apostolic band, tried to voice with his pen that which, when Paul saw it, was inexpressible. Listen to the choirs of angels in numberless circles about the glassy sea and its throne as they speak His worthy praise. Listen to those eternal

creatures chant, “*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!*” (v. 8b). Let us see with John that band which no man could number and listen to their songs of adoration and praise. Do you know Him, Christ the Lord, who merits such praise? See Him now as the Lamb that was slain! For He is to be praised by we who owe Him our all!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, we thank You for Your Word that transports us to that place of inexhaustible peace, that quiet haven, our eternal refuge! Yet, Lord, we are reminded of what is ahead in the book of The Revelation. How our hearts break when we think about the carnage, the bloodshed, the din of warfare, the dreadfulness of the pestilence, the scorching sun, the demonic hoards screeching from the pit causing havoc and horror upon the earth, and the malignant sores of oozing blackness that will destroy half the population of our planet. Nevertheless, we praise You that while all that is going on, above it all You are seated upon the throne. And before You rises endless adoration as You, the awesome Sovereign of the universe, sit upon the throne. Before You the breathtaking scene of thunder, lightning, and the colors of the rainbow mingle with the brilliantly awesome song of the redeemed before Your throne as the bowls of prayer are poured out as the voices of the saints rise before You. We long to join that day, that scene, that moment, that wonder. Sometimes it seems so far away ... I pray that Your Spirit would minister to our hearts; help us to realize that we are only a heartbeat away from eternity, and we should get ready. Perhaps today You may gloriously come for Your saints, or call for us through the door of death. We don't know for sure if we are going to be alive tomorrow, no matter how many plans we have made, or how many commitments we have set up. We pray that this moment would be a time of preparation. Stir our hearts to worship; prepare our souls for that awesome scene before Your throne. Oh, worthy Lamb, Creator, and Redeemer, fill our hearts with praise and adoration that overflows for You! Open our eyes to behold wonderful things from Your Law! Thank You for letting us join in Your worship! In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Awesome Sovereign on the Throne

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice ... was like a trumpet ... saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place **after this**” (Revelation 4:1, emphasis added).

The phrase *After these things* is a key: by the inspiration of God's Spirit, you are now looking into the future. All that God says is going to happen in chapters 4–22 of Revelation will come to pass exactly as predicted. Now step with me into the worship center of the universe to hear heaven rejoicing in our Lord Jesus Christ as He prepares to take back what Satan usurped.

Worship of God and His loveliness is at His invitation. Because God is the One who invites us into His presence, worship is not to be taken lightly. Worship is not a *right*—it is a *privilege*. God will invite us to worship when we are going through cave times (like David); He will also invite us when we are enraptured with joy (perhaps by inspirational music). No matter where we are on the spectrum, God invites us to come into His presence. We can thus worship the Lord anywhere, anytime, and anyhow—just as the apostle John did while imprisoned on Patmos.

In his classic booklet, *My Heart—Christ's Home*, Robert Boyd Munger compares being saved to Jesus taking over our “body house” by moving in and systematically cleaning out each room. My favorite chapter is the “Dining Room” where Jesus sits every morning, noon, and night inviting us to come and eat with Him (Revelation 3:20). He wants us to dine with Him daily, and linger lovingly in His presence.

Worship of God must acknowledge that He is in charge: *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne* (Revelation 4:2). Worship is Spirit-energized; it is a spiritual activity. It is not carnal, or something we can pump up. All true worship will focus on God, not on the human level. Worship lifts us out of the mundane and into God's presence.

We cannot fully worship God, however, if we are trying to run our own lives. Anything that is out of control is not under His control. All the areas of our lives must be under God's control: emotions, appetites, family, and finances. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, sits on the throne, and He wants us to acknowledge that truth anywhere, anytime, and anyhow.

Worship of God is utterly beautiful: *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* (Revelation 4:3). Jasper is a clear gem, and sardius is red. Like Saturn, the throne of God is ringed: vertically, like a 360-degree arch, a rainbow surrounds God's throne; horizontally, like a vast plain, the saints gather at the foot of God's throne.

Do you want to see the emerald rainbow, the jasper, and the sardius Ancient of Days sitting on His throne? Then *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14; see also Matthew 5:8).

Worship of God unites the redeemed of all the ages at the feet of Jesus: *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* (Revelation 4:4).

The number 24 suggests many biblical ideas. There were twenty-four courses of priests in the service of the tabernacle and temple (1 Chronicles 24:3–5). There were also two groups of twelve that represent God's saints: the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Christ's church. God says, “I want an everlasting constant priesthood before My worship in the tabernacle.” The number 24 also speaks of: priests offering ceaseless worship; the gates and the foundation stones of heaven; the old and new people of God, the redeemed of all time; and the Old and New Testament saints merging together into the people of God who offer worship to Him.

Will you be among these worshiping saints? I hear a lot of people say they are going to heaven. In some locales, it seems that everyone is a Christian, or at least they think they are. So I ask

them, “Have you made your reservations? Are you ‘*registered in heaven*’?” (See Hebrews 12:23a.) Have you ever gone to a hotel and been told that your reservation had been lost, that no one knew you were coming, and that all the rooms were full? A lot of people who are in churches every Sunday are going to have that horrible experience when they face Jesus (Matthew 7:21–23). I therefore exhort you to ... *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:28–29).

TUESDAY: The Awesome Scene around the Throne

And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices ... (Revelation 4:5, emphasis added).

The writers of Scripture, seeking to describe the indescribable, have portrayed the presence of God as an unbelievable display of power filled with thunder and lightning, blinding light, and a sparkling, dazzling array of colors and rainbows. That very thought of Him should make you want to burst forth in worship exclaiming: ... *Give unto the LORD the glory due His name: Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness* (Psalm 29:2)!

Worship of God flows when we heed His holiness. In his visions, Ezekiel saw what Moses saw at Mount Sinai (Ezekiel 1–2); when God came down to give the law, thunder and lightning accompanied Him (Exodus 19:16; see also Hebrews 12:18–23). God’s voice was so powerful that it frightened them; they thought that they were going to disintegrate! God told them, “I am so holy and you are so unholy that if even your animals get near Me, kill them.” His theme of all the Old Testament legislation was thus: “Stay away from Me; you are unholy!”

Worship of God is unceasingly offered in His presence: *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 4:6). This verse hearkens back to Ezekiel and what he saw. The *four living creatures* seem to be a hybrid of the cherubim (living ones) of Ezekiel and the seraphim (burning ones) of Isaiah. In verse 7, below, they are the living-burning ones with four faces. Note that even though Scripture writers usually used terms that no human fully understands, they always did so with a view of magnifying the Lord.

Worship of God is to reflect Jesus’ attributes of kingship, servanthood, humanity, and deity: *The first living creature was like a lion* [royalty], *the second living creature like a calf* [servanthood], *the third living creature had a face like a man* [image of God], *and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle* [divinity] (Revelation 4:7). True worship will always reflect God’s attributes.

When God came down and expressed Himself in an image, what did He look like? *Jesus Christ*. He looked like us because we are created in the image of God. In the Old Testament there are four prophecies of Christ called the Branch Prophecies. Jesus was prophesied to be: King—the Root of David (Isaiah 11:1); My Servant—denoted by the calf (Zechariah 3:8); my perfect man (Zechariah 6:12); and God—the eagle (Isaiah 4:2).

The New Testament begins with the four Gospels which have corresponding themes: Matthew—the Perfect King; Mark—the Perfect Servant; Luke—the Perfect Man; and John—the Divine One, God in human flesh.

These *four living creatures* in 4:7 seem to be connected with the whole revelation of God, and thus reflect His attributes. As a child of the King, what attributes of His life do *you* reflect?

WEDNESDAY: The Awesome Song before the Throne

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8, emphasis added),

Night and day *the four living creatures* focus solely on God's holiness. In Hebrew, when something is repeated three times (as in "*Holy, holy, holy!*") it indicates an utter and complete emphasis. "*Almighty*" is used nine times in Revelation; the only other time in the New Testament is in 2 Corinthians 6:17–18 where our utterly holy "*LORD Almighty*" tells us that if we will separate ourselves from false religion and sinful practices, He promises: "*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters ...*" Oh, how getting to experience the full richness of being His child should prompt us to worship and adore our almighty God!

Worship of God is to be centered on Him. Isaiah told us that with two wings the living creatures covered their feet, with two they covered their face, and with two they flew. This speaks of total submission before God—utter humility seeking holiness and utmost service to God.

If you want to enjoy God's presence by lifting your heart and voice in worship to Him, avoid anything that will detract from your relationship with Him and His holiness. Instead, expose yourself daily to His Word. For if you hunger and thirst for God and His righteousness, and separate yourself from the world, ... *He shall give you the desires of your heart* (Psalm 37:4b). If you do not want God's presence on earth, however, you will not have it in eternity. The Lord will give you what you want.

Worship of God is to always honor and glorify Him: *Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, ... the twenty-four elders fall down before Him ... and worship Him..., and cast their crowns before the throne ...* (4:9–10). In verse 10, the twenty-four elders are saying to the Lord, "I don't want the crowns; I am not in charge of my life any more. God, You are the One who deserves all that I have!"

A popular notion is that *cast their crowns* refers to giving our rewards to the Lord, but that is not all that the apostle John meant. To understand that verse, we need to apply the first law of interpretation: *What did the author mean, and what did the primary audience understand it to mean?*

In the first century, the Roman Empire was approaching its zenith. When a kingdom was conquered, the Romans had triumphal processions that began with all the conquered citizens, soldiers, and the spoils; then the conquering general followed in his chariot. When the Roman

general got to the center of the Forum before the emperor, the conquered king was brought in and, on his knees, would cast his crown at the feet of the general, who then put his hobnail-sandaled foot on the defeated king's neck. Afterward, the king was executed.

It will be a far different scene for us when we appear before the Lord God Almighty. We won't be marched in with chains; we will come before Him saying, "You don't have to put Your chastening foot on our necks or drag us with chains. We willingly and lovingly want to serve You!"

Worship demands our total submission to God, which says to Him: *King of my life I crown Thee now—Thine shall the glory be; Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow, Lead me to Calvary.*¹

THURSDAY: Worship Fills Revelation

"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11, emphasis added).

At this point in God's plan for the ages, we will have already arrived in heaven by way of "the snatching away," the Rapture. Thus, we will be part of the redeemed of all the ages who will worship in this celestial atmosphere around the throne.

Worship—to glorify God and enjoy Him forever—is our main purpose for existence. And true worship will always center totally on God, as is seen in the fourth stanza of this glorifying old hymn: *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty! All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth, and sky, and sea; Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty! God in Three persons, blessed Trinity!*²

Let us now look in chronological order at chapters 4–22 and see Christ, the Lamb, being exalted by the faithful angelic hosts and the redeemed saints. You see, worship is the background music of God's kingdom. Songs of worship and triumph, which occur in eleven chapters of Revelation (4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, and 22), make up the background music to the story.

Chapter 4—Jesus is worthy of worship as the Creator. God, as Creator, is on the throne. Salvation starts with the acknowledgment of Jesus as Creator: *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him* (Colossians 1:16; see also Acts 14:15; 17:24).

Jesus is worthy of worship because He ... *is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6).

All the angelic hosts worship Him: *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"* (Revelation 4:8). By this point we will get to join in the worship of heaven! At last, we will blend our voices with all of the angels and all of Creation and start our eternal, sacrificial service to our King.

The twenty-four elders worship Him: *"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created"* (Revelation 4:11; see also Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 4:6).

Chapter 5—Jesus is worthy of worship as the Redeeming Savior. In this chapter, the focus turns to Jesus the Redeemer, God's Son, who is before the throne. And the twenty-four elders worship Him: *"You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth"* (Revelation 5:9–10; see also Titus 2:14).

In Revelation 5:13 the worship goes to Father and Son, which affirms Christ's deity: *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! ... Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"* (5:12, 14). The innumerable angelic hosts and all Creation worship Him, for He is our blessed Savior for all eternity!

Chapter 7—Jesus is worthy of worship as the Giver of Life. The innumerable multitude cries out in worship: *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* (Revelation 7:10). This is salvation from death's power. Eternal life liberates us to see that we are only temporarily in this body. All the angels and creatures fall and say, *"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen"* (Revelation 7:12). He is worthy of all praise, for He is the giver of life (John 14:6; Acts 5:20)!

The heartbeat of God's Word is worship. In fact, Jesus defines believers as *worshippers* because the driving message of salvation is to worship the God of heaven. The Scriptures open in Genesis with God walking and talking with Adam and Eve, His worshipers. Exodus contains elaborate plans for a tent—its sole purpose being to bring worshipers to God. Psalms, the longest book at the heart of God's Word, is a manual on ways to worship the God of the universe. The rest of the Old Testament is a series of prophets lamenting the neglect and abandonment of worship by God's people who were to be a kingdom of worshipers (priests).

The New Testament opens with the introduction in the Gospels of the God of heaven, on earth, seeking creatures who would be willing to be worshipers. The book of Acts records what happens when average people from every walk of life, every strata of society, and every depth of sin, are bound together with a common passion for being lifelong worshipers. The Epistles are a manual on how to grow as worshipers. God's Word then closes in Revelation with all of God's worshipers home at last with their Creator—and joyfully worshipping Him!

Is your heart the heart of a worshiper? The word "worship" is full of meaning; it expresses the idea of "falling down, prostrating oneself, and kissing the feet or the hem of the garment of the one honored." We should ponder William Temple's wonderful definition of worship, which is "to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."³

FRIDAY: The Essence of True Worship

*For we ... **worship God in the Spirit**, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh* (Philippians 3:3, emphasis added).

Worship that focuses on God and God alone is true spiritual worship—worship that is energized by the Spirit of God. How do we know when we are operating in the power of the Holy Spirit? Here is a test: where God’s Spirit reigns, believers relate to the Word—this is Spirit-filled teaching; where God’s Spirit reigns, believers relate to each other—this is Spirit-filled fellowship; where God’s Spirit reigns, believers relate to the Lord—this is Spirit-filled worship; where God’s Spirit reigns, believers relate to the world—this is Spirit-filled evangelism.⁴

God is the cause of all things, the fountain of all perfection, without parts or dimensions, for He is eternal. He is an *infinite* Spirit—*filling* the heavens and the earth—*pervading, governing, and upholding* all things!

God can only be pleased with that which resembles Himself. Therefore, He must hate *sin* and *sinfulness*; He can only delight in those who are made partakers of His own divine nature. Since all creatures were made by Him, all owe Him obedience and reverence; but, to be acceptable to this infinite Spirit, the worship must be of a *spiritual* nature—springing from the *heart*, through the influence of the Holy Ghost. It must be in truth, not only in *sincerity*, but performed according to that divine *revelation* which He has given men of Himself.

God is worshiped in *spirit* when, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, “believers bring all their affections, appetites, and desires to the throne of God; and God is worshiped in *truth*, when God’s Word guides every purpose and passion of a believer’s heart, and regulates every act of a believer’s worship.”⁵

The essence of worship is spiritual. In John 4, Jesus told the woman at the well, “The location of worship is no longer the main concern. The issue is not *where* you worship, but rather *whom* you worship and *how* you worship.” God is an immortal, invisible, and omnipresent Spirit. He cannot be seen or touched, and He cannot be represented by an idol or any kind of likeness. Yet, just as an earthly son looks like his dad, so Jesus came to give us the image of the invisible God. And so *Father* was Jesus’ favorite title for God.

The Gospels record about seventy times when Jesus spoke to God, and every time He called Him Father, except when He was on the cross bearing the judgment for man’s sin. Then He said, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus spoke three times in John 4 of worshipping “*the Father*.” But only once does Jesus refer to God as “*our Father*,” and that was not a direct address to God. It was a sample prayer, as the content shows, for Jesus would not have asked for forgiveness (Matthew 6:9).

The woman at the well needed a lesson in what real worship was all about. She was looking for the proper method of worship, but saw only two options—the Samaritan method and the Jewish method. Look at how John MacArthur compares the differences between man’s worship and God’s:⁶

| Samaritan Worship | Jewish Worship | True Worship |
|---|--|--|
| Done in ignorance. | Done strictly. | Flows from God’s Spirit within us. |
| Samaritan spiritual knowledge was limited because they rejected all of the Old Testament except the Pentateuch. | Jews were full of knowledge and accepted all the books of the Old Testament. | When God’s Word is honored, and God’s Spirit is honored, God is pleased with the worship. |
| Warm heresy is enthusiastic worship without proper information. | Cold orthodoxy is dead worship with the right information. | Eager, excited, enthusiastic heartfelt devotion to the truth of God is worship that flows from the inside out. |
| They worshiped in spirit, but not in truth. That is why Jesus said, “You worship that which you do not know” (v. 22). | They worshiped in truth but lacked the spirit. | God seeks those who will worship in spirit and in truth. |
| Enthusiastic heresy is heat without light. | Barren orthodoxy is light without heat. | Worship is not an external activity for which an environment must be created. |
| Sincerity, enthusiasm, and aggressiveness are important, but they must be based on truth. | Truth is foundational, but if it doesn’t result in an eager, excited, enthusiastic heart, it is deficient. | It takes place on the inside, in the spirit. Psalm 45:1 is the expression of David’s worshiping heart: “My heart overflows with a good theme.” |
| Worship that occurred on Mount Gerazim was enthusiastic heresy. | Worship offered at Jerusalem was barren, lifeless orthodoxy. | The same two extremes are still with us today. |
| Gerazim had the spirit but not the truth. | Jerusalem had the truth but not the spirit. | Jesus rebuked both styles of worship when He said, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24) |

Spiritual worship is an evidence of salvation. One who is not saved cannot truly worship; one who is truly saved will be motivated by the indwelling Holy Spirit to worship. It is fair, then, to examine ourselves on the basis of our worship. If you have trouble worshiping, maybe you are not saved. If you get bored in church, or if you do not mind missing church altogether, it may be because the Holy Spirit is not in you prompting your heart. If He is there, you must yield your will to His power.

SATURDAY: Adoring Your King

“The kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15, emphasis added).

In Wednesday’s devotional, we saw that in the first century the Roman Empire held triumphal processions and victory ceremonies to honor conquering generals. The apostle Paul had that imagery in mind when he wrote: ... *God ... always leads us in triumph in Christ ...* (2 Corinthians 2:14). Jesus is the conqueror of all kingdoms!

Chapter 11—Jesus is worthy of worship as the conquering warrior. When it is announced in heaven that *“the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ”* (Revelation 11:15), *the twenty-four elders ... fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned”* (11:17). At this point, Jesus is reigning over all!

Chapters 12, 15, 16, 17—Jesus is worthy of worship as the crusher of Satan. First John 3:8 tells us that the person who practices sin is *of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning*, but Jesus came to *destroy the works of the devil*. Because Satan was defeated by Christ at Calvary, we can have victory over our adversary’s attempts *“to steal, and to kill, and to destroy”* (John 10:10) us here, and in heaven we will never face his hatred again.

In Revelation 12:10–12, Satan and his angels are cast out of heaven—to nevermore have access to God: *“Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”* That is cause for great rejoicing and worship—forever and ever!

In Revelation 15:3–4, the victorious Tribulation warriors ... *sing the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? for You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.”* His saints sing songs of victory!

In chapters 16 and 17, the angels of the altar, the waters, and the earth all say, *"You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due. ... These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called chosen, and faithful"* (16:5–6; 17:14).

Chapter 19—Jesus is worthy of worship as our just judge. Creation echoes the majesty of His worthy judgment and sacrifice! In Revelation 19:1–5, the redeemed multitude and the twenty-four elders proclaim: *"Allelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her."* Again they said, *"Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!"* And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, *"Amen! Alleluia!"* Then a voice came from the throne, saying, *"Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!"*

They then fall before their just judge, to whom they submit. In unison, the multitude cries out to the Lord in exultation: *"Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come ..."* (19:6–7). This is the shout of anticipation for unbroken union with the King of the universe!

Chapters 21–22—Jesus is worthy of worship for coming as the Bridegroom, our Emmanuel. All praise Emmanuel! God is now with us as He promised (Matthew 1:22). Look at what is in store for His children: *"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"* (21:3–4).

At the end of Revelation, the voice of Jesus is calling all who are thirsty to come to Him: *"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."* And the Spirit and the bride say, *"Come!"* And let him who hears say, *"Come!"* And let him who thirsts come. *Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (22:16–17).

Make a choice to live in hope. To live in hope, it is vital that you understand three aspects of the nature of true worship: (1) True worship of God must be founded on God's Word (Colossians 3:15–17); (2) true worship of God must be clear of sin (Psalm 66:18); and (3) true worship of God must be Spirit-energized.

All true worship is a spiritual activity that centers on God, not on the human level. As you yield to Him, the Holy Spirit will energize you to adore Christ in all His loveliness—the One who is a multi-faceted diamond in eternal cascading glory. Jesus Christ is our eternal Creator, our Redeeming Savior, our giver of life, our conquering warrior, our crusher of Satan, our just judge, and our Bridegroom, Emmanuel.

A God-honoring way to conclude this wonderful week's visit to the worship center of the universe is to adore Christ's loveliness by worshipfully singing this beautiful song to your King!

O Worship the King

*O worship the King all glorious above,
And gratefully sing His wonderful love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.*

*O tell of His might and sing of His grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.*

*Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.*

*Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend. Amen.*

—Robert Grant

Week 22—See Christ in the Old Testament

(From Genesis—Daniel; Revelation 4–5)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you see
Christ in the Old Testament—from Genesis to Daniel!



SUNDAY: See Christ in the Entire Old Testament

... *Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself* (Luke 24:27, emphasis added).

Last week we were transported in time to the worship center of the universe to adore the loveliness of our awesome Sovereign, Jesus Christ, who sits on the throne in Revelation 4. Now hold onto your seat, because we are about to depart on a “Jet Tour” of the Old Testament prophets. Many of the 404 verses of Revelation are quotations and allusions to these prophets, but most believers have trouble understanding the Old Testament in general, let alone the seventeen prophetic books of Isaiah to Malachi.

If you will stay on board with me over the next three weeks, you should grasp the simple message and direction of each Old Testament book, and especially the seventeen prophetic books. As you see the whole scope and plan of God in these books reflected in Revelation, they will become even clearer.

The Scriptures are all about God revealing Himself to His human creatures. The ultimate expression of God’s nature and character is Christ. Note the words of Hebrews 1:3: *Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

W. A. Criswell liked to say that the only God we will ever see is Jesus Christ. There is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are invisible. They have representations such as a dove and a glowing light, but they are not corporeal. However, God the Father did take on some kind of form at times; it was called

a theophany, which is a *visible* but not necessarily *material* manifestation of deity to a human person. Christ, however, will eternally exist in His resurrection body.

Since the Word of God reveals God, and Jesus is the image of the invisible God, then we can find and worship our Lord Jesus Christ in every part of the Bible. Each book reveals some truths about our beautiful Lord Jesus! (To see the central theme of Christ in all the Scriptures, look at Revelation 19:10, John 5:39, and Luke 24:27.)

The Scriptures are Christ-Centered. They are unique, powerful, and divine! Note the symmetrical pattern God presents in the Old Testament:

- **Books of History—17:** Five are major (Genesis to Deuteronomy); twelve are historical (Joshua to Esther).
- **Books of Poetry—5:** Job to the Song of Solomon (located in the middle of the Old Testament).
- **Books of Prophecy—17:** Five are the Major Prophets (Isaiah to Daniel); twelve are the Minor Prophets (Hosea to Malachi). Of these twelve, nine are pre-Exilic and three are post-Exilic.

Today is an overview of seeing Christ in the books of History; the books of Poetry will be covered on Monday; and on Tuesday we will then begin our tour of the seventeen prophetic books.

The Five Major Books of History: The Pentateuch is the designation for the first five Old Testament books that were authored by Moses. We are sure of that because Jesus said so in His ministry while here on earth. In the books of History we see God's servants following the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Creator in the garden, the Rock in the wilderness, the Angel of the Lord, and so on. These five books are crucial because they lay a foundation for the rest of God's Word; note their unifying themes:

1. **Genesis** pictures Christ as "**calling all things into being**" by creating the universe. The Scriptures are the only reliable source of information on the origin and purpose of the universe, man, sin, nations, the covenant, and the curse. **Key Word—Generations** (used ten times as an outline).
2. **Exodus** pictures Christ as "**calling Israel out of bondage**" by delivering His people. He is "*the Way*" out of Egypt, out of sin, out of earth. **Key Word—Deliverance**.
3. **Leviticus** pictures Christ as "**calling Israel unto consecration**" by opening the approach to a holy God. He is present with His people ("*before the Lord*" appears sixty times), and He demands holiness of them (11:44; 19:2; 20:7). **Key Word—Holiness** (occurs ninety-three times).

4. **Numbers** pictures Christ as “**calling Israel from confusion**” by dealing with His unfaithful people. Christ is the Faithful One. **Key Word—Chastening.**
5. **Deuteronomy** pictures Christ as “**calling Israel back to the covenant**” by seeking loyalty from His chosen people. He is the Promise Keeper. **Key Word—Covenant** (occurs twenty-seven times).

The Twelve Historic Books:

1. **Joshua** pictures Christ as **Commander of the Lord’s Army**. He is leading His people in conquest. **Key Idea—Obedience.**
2. **Judges** pictures Christ as the **Chastener of His Wayward People**. There are seven specific sin-salvation cycles in this book. **Key Idea—Disobedience.**
3. **Ruth** pictures Christ as the **Kinsman to His Needy People**. **Key Word—Loyalty.**
- 4–9. **First Samuel–2 Chronicles** pictures Christ as the **Perfect King**. In Samuel God seeks for a man; in Kings God sees all; in Chronicles God saves, preserves, and rewards His own. **Key Words—Eyes of the Lord** (used thirteen times).
10. **Ezra** pictures Christ as our **Peg** (this was a figure of speech that indicated permanence and prominence) **in the Holy Place (9:8)**. **Key Word—Returning.**
11. **Nehemiah** pictures Christ as our **Sure Foundation**. **Key Word—Restoring.**
12. **Esther** pictures Christ as our **Unseen Defender**. **Key Word—Protecting.**

The whole Bible is unlike any other book in the universe! And with that truth deeply upon your heart, in the days ahead, shouldn’t you treat His Word differently, read it diligently, wait before it expectantly, and from it learn to live triumphantly? Remember: Jesus shines from every book of the Bible!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Lord Jesus, thank You for letting us see a little bit of what You must have taught on the road to Emmaus—beginning with Moses and pointing out to those disciples how You are in every part of the Bible. There’s no greater study than to find that one thread links together every part of Your Word, and that thread is finding Christ in all the Scriptures. Thank You for letting us go on this journey together. Strengthen our hearts, and attune our minds, to the treasures of Your Word. We want to see, to find, to believe, and to feast upon those treasures! Oh Christ, thank*

You for making us conquerors, satisfying us, giving us hope in all our days. And we thank You in the name of Jesus, and for His glory we pray. Amen.

MONDAY: See Christ in the Books of Poetry

*They **divide My garments** among them, and for My clothing they **cast lots*** (Psalm 22:18, emphasis added).

These five books, in the middle of the Old Testament, deal with the heart of Jewish life: pain, worship, living, life, and love.

1. **Job** pictures Christ as our **sure Redeemer**. This book gives the truth from God that “Christ is our sufficiency” in pain and suffering.
2. **Psalms** pictures Christ as our **Good Shepherd**. This book gives the truth from God that “Christ is our worship.”
3. **Proverbs** pictures Christ as our **wisdom**. This book gives the truth from God that “Christ is our wisdom”—He is wisdom incarnate. Proverbs teaches us how to live by principles, not promises.
4. **Ecclesiastes** pictures Christ as our **hope of contentment**. This book gives the truth from God that “Christ is our way of life.”
5. **The Song of Solomon** pictures Christ as our **beloved**. This book gives the truth from God that “Christ is our altogether lovely one.”

The Scriptures are all about God revealing Himself to His creatures. The ultimate expression of God’s nature and character is Christ. In the books of Poetry we see God’s servants worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the suffering One, the Good Shepherd, the Redeemer!

We can learn from a seasoned sufferer—Job. High on the list of what Job’s perseverance taught is this: even when suffering, pleasing God should be our goal in life—not happiness, comfort, or satisfaction. For “... *happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.*” ... *Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ... Make it [your] aim ... to be well pleasing to Him* (Job 5:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 5:9).

Following God often entails losing precious possessions and suffering pain for His sake: “*Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him*” (Job 23:8–9). Tests like this are meant to be faith builders. When we need God most, yet He seems silent, it

is time to stretch our faith and, like Job, say “... *He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10). What a precious and proven truth!

Trusting God turns present losses into future gains: *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. Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. ... After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days* (Job 42:10-11, 16-17).

Ecclesiastes 9 contains some valuable life principles. For example, by the fruit of the Spirit called joy, we can rise above our circumstances by choosing to be contagiously happy: *Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works* (Ecclesiastes 9:7). As God's children, through Christ's forgiveness and approval, we can be continually free of guilt and its bondage: *Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil* (Ecclesiastes 9:8).

Ecclesiastes 9:9 tells us of the importance of being constantly committed to God in every area of life: *Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun* (Ecclesiastes 9:9). God desires that we live life to the maximum by the power of the Holy Spirit: *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going* (Ecclesiastes 9:10). In other words, live life zestfully!

Now that we have had an overview of seeing Christ in the Old Testament books of History and books of Poetry, tomorrow we will begin focusing on the theme of these three weeks—seeing Christ in the seventeen prophetic books. Remember: many of the 404 verses in Revelation are quotations and allusions to these prophets. By understanding Isaiah to Malachi, we can better appreciate the richness of Revelation and more fully worship the One whom the book exalts. Are you worshipping Christ as He deserves?

TUESDAY: Isaiah Says to Worship Our God of Salvation¹

*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*** (Isaiah 53:5-6, emphasis added).

Isaiah (740-681 B.C.) was a contemporary with Hosea (753-715 B.C.) and Micah (742-687 B.C.). From the revolt of Satan to the rule of the Savior, all is told by this most eloquent prophet, Isaiah. He was the “Shakespeare of the prophets” and the “Paul of the Old Testament.” Isaiah has more to say about the greatness of God (Isaiah 40, 43), the horrors of the Tribulation (Isaiah 24), the wonders of the Millennium (Isaiah 35), and the ministry of Christ (Isaiah 53) than any other

book in the Bible. Isaiah 53 is probably the most important and far-reaching chapter in the Old Testament, as it is quoted from or alluded to eighty-five times in the New Testament. Jesus said that Isaiah saw His glory and spoke of Him (John 12:41).

The book of Isaiah is an extended commentary on Jonah 2:9, where that prophet exclaimed from the fish's belly, "*Salvation is of the Lord!*" The word "salvation" appears thirty-three times in the writing of the prophets and, of these, twenty-six instances occur in Isaiah. Isaiah is divided into two sections: 1:1–39:8 and 40:1–66:24.

The first thirty-nine chapters describe the judgment by the Lord. (This seems to almost parallel the Old Testament's thirty-nine books that declare the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God.) The next twenty-seven chapters describe the comfort in redemption and restoration. (This seems to almost parallel the New Testament's twenty-seven books that declare the grace, compassion, and glory of God.)

The book of Isaiah has three major themes that may be summarized in personal choices similar to those made by Isaiah.

First Theme—The overwhelming sense of sin and the wrath of God against it. This is clearly seen in the twenty-one times that Isaiah uses the word "woe." In God's sight, ... *We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses [good deeds] are like filthy rags; ... And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities* (Isaiah 64:6–7). **Personal Choice:** I will become a person of conviction.

Second Theme—The all-pervading awareness of the power, majesty, and holiness of God. Twenty-three times Isaiah uses the divine name of "*The Holy One of God*," a name nearly unique to Isaiah (except for five other passages). *The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever* (Isaiah 32:17). **Personal Choice:** I will confess that You, oh God, are holy.

Third Theme—The crystal-clear sight of the salvation and coming victory of Christ: *Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will see the land that is very far off* (Isaiah 33:17). **Personal Choice:** I will live with confidence.

I pray that you will choose to become a person of conviction: acknowledge that God is holy, and is therefore One in whom you can place your total confidence. Oh worship your King in all His beauty, and bow before Him!

WEDNESDAY: Jeremiah Says to Worship Our God of Repentance

*"Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you. ... It is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and **the fear of Me is not in you**," says the LORD God of hosts* (Jeremiah 2:19, emphasis added).

Some contemporaries of Jeremiah (627–586 B.C.) were Habakkuk (612–588 B.C.) and Zephaniah (640–621 B.C.). The Scriptures tell us: "*Before I formed you [Jeremiah] in the womb*

I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). This is a great scripture for those who say that human life begins at conception. God communicated with a human in the womb; Jeremiah was there as a person, and God chose him there. Jeremiah must have had an incredible childhood!

Jeremiah's woes were unimaginable to our relatively peaceful lives. He lived through the death throes of the nation of Judah. From an earthly perspective, his life was a failure. During his lifetime he watched the decay of God's chosen people, the horrible destruction of Jerusalem, and the deportation of the nation to Babylon. **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we feel like our lives are failures.*

Jeremiah preached for forty years and saw no visible result among those he served. Instead, those countrymen sought to kill him if he wouldn't stop preaching doom (11:19–23). He had virtually no converts to show for a lifetime of ministry. **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we see no results from all we try to do for God.*

This suffering and lonely prophet had no one in whom to find joy and comfort; his own family and friends were involved in plots against him (12:6). He never had the joy of a godly home because God never allowed him to marry, and thus he suffered incredibly agonizing loneliness (16:2). **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we are alone.*

Jeremiah lived under a constant threat of death; there were plots to kill him in secret so no one would find him (18:20–23). **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we are close to death.*

He lived with physical pain; he was beaten severely and then bound in wooden stocks (20:1–2). **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we are filled with pain.*

He lived with emotional pain; his friends spied on him deceitfully and for revenge (20:10). **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we are sad and disheartened and feel betrayed.*

He was consumed with sorrow and shame; Jeremiah even cursed the day he was born (20:14–18). His life ended with no relief; he was falsely accused of being a traitor to his own country (37:13–14). **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we are sorrowing.*

He was arrested, beaten, thrown into a dungeon, and starved many days (37:15–21). If an Ethiopian Gentile had not interceded on his behalf, he would have died there (38:7–13). **The lesson:** *We can hope in Christ even when we find no relief from trials.*

Perhaps the most striking feature of the book of Jeremiah is the fact that despite the terrible woes in his life (1:5), he saw that it was from the Master Potter's hand (18:1–6). At the point of near despair over his failed ministry, God asked him to go to the potter's house, and there he would get a message from the Lord (18:2). Although Israel had failed so grievously, the heavenly potter was willing to bless His people again if they would repent and yield to His perfect touch.

In the end, tradition tells us that Jeremiah was exiled to Egypt. While faithfully preaching God's Word to the exiles, he was stoned to death by his own people. In spite of everything, he found hope in worshiping our God of repentance. And you, too, can find living hope in Christ even when supposedly bad things happen to good people. Here is how: ... *Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"*

*The LORD is good to those who **wait for Him**, to the soul who seeks Him* (Lamentations 3:22–25 emphasis added).

When troubles come, knowing that God is good to all who turn to Him for help, the person who is genuine trusts in Christ and finds hope to “keep on keeping on”!

THURSDAY: Lamentations Says to Worship Our God of Hope

*“**The LORD is my portion**,” says my soul, “therefore I hope in Him!”* (Lamentations 3:24, emphasis added).

Lamentations was written by Jeremiah. As he sat down and looked over the smoldering ruins of his beloved Jerusalem, his voice rose to the wail of sorrow, a lament. That is why the book is called Lamentations, which was a funeral dirge over the City of God. Inspired by the Spirit of God, this serves as a message of encouragement that the next time things crash and burn in your life and your whole world is falling apart—family, health, finances, emotions—look to God as the God of hope!

Lamentations is a beautiful master-crafted poem with five stanzas. Chapters 1–2 and 4–5 each start with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (twenty-two in all). This form of poetry, called an acrostic, is lovely in form and powerful in communication. Chapter 3, the poem’s centerpiece, has three acrostics, or a total of sixty-six verses. The theme of Lamentations and this middle chapter agree: “Great is Your faithfulness, almighty God!” The Lord taught Jeremiah that no matter how the world was falling apart, personally or nationally, he could still hope in God. And that is why we can find living hope for the end of days!

For an even clearer picture, let’s go back to where we started in Lamentations. Meet Jeremiah. With his life in shambles—his friends all dead, and the smoke and stench of destruction all around everything he had ever held dear—Jeremiah wrote the poem that explains the pathway of hope.

The Pathway of Hope: Have you ever felt that life was too painful to even go on? Jeremiah did, and without the benefits and blessings we have in this church age. He persevered with living hope in the midst of that pain. In Lamentations 3, we can see the pains God uses, manages, allows, and, most of all, handles for us. Note how Jeremiah trusted and endured through the pain of these stresses.

- **Broken physical health:** *He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones* (v. 4).
- **Deep emotional strain:** *He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe* (v. 5).
- **Periods of dark depression:** *He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago* (v. 6).

- **Desperation and the burden of being trapped:** *He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy* (v. 7).
- **Feeling out of touch and distant from God:** *Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer* (v. 8).
- **Frustration and confusion:** *He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked* (v. 9).
- **Anxiety and sadness:** *You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity* (v. 17).
- **Physical weakness and hopelessness:** *And I said, “My strength and my hope have perished from the LORD”* (v. 18).
- **Bitter affliction and aimlessness:** *Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall* (v. 19).

If Jeremiah were to stop with verse 19, we might feel discouraged as we face our own trials. But his list of woes actually crescendoed until it broke forth into overflowing hope in verses 21–26. After praising God for His daily compassions and great faithfulness, Jeremiah testified: *The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord* (vv. 25–26, emphasis added).

What a God we serve! Just as He offers *hope* in Lamentations, allow Him to be what you need to make it through life on a *hopeless* earth. As we speed toward the end of days, God offers living hope to each of His children. Let Him weave your weaknesses, like fragile fibers, in with the countless strands of His promises. Let Him stretch and twist you into waiting hope. And then, when troubles increase, let Him bring you a fresh portion of His hope and goodness as you wait enduringly with hope in Christ.

FRIDAY: Ezekiel Says to Worship Our God of the New Heart

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; ... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26–27, emphasis added).

Some contemporaries of Ezekiel (593–571 B.C.) were Daniel (605–536 B.C.), Habakkuk (612–588 B.C.), and Jeremiah (627–586 B.C.). While Jeremiah (forty-one years of ministry, 627–586 B.C.) played the funeral dirge of doom over Jerusalem, a lonely exiled prophet named Ezekiel (twenty years of ministry, 592–572 B.C.) was watching the gathering storm God would use to sweep Judah into captivity. In 598 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar captured Ezekiel along with 10,000 other fellow Judeans. Ezekiel arrived in Babylon at the age of twenty-five (2 Kings 24:8–16; Ezekiel 1:1–2). Deported to 200 miles north of Babylon, Ezekiel was 600 miles from Jeremiah in Jerusalem for the last twelve years of Jeremiah’s ministry. And for twenty-six years Ezekiel was 200 miles north of Daniel (606–533 B.C.) who was in Babylon for his seventy-three years of

ministry. These three prophets overlapped parts of their prophetic ministries. As Ezekiel lived away from his home and his people, he learned that he was never far from his God. God taught him that His presence was not limited to the temple in Jerusalem.

During the exile, Ezekiel lived in a house to which numerous captives came and sought counsel from him (8:1; 14:1; 20:1). After five silent years of counseling, he began twenty years of speaking for God. At age thirty, Ezekiel, like our Lord Jesus Christ, began his ministry by a river. In an astounding vision he saw cherubim, angelic hosts, and indescribable sights portraying the very throne room of God. Ezekiel was God's man. He saw God—and it changed his life!

Ezekiel saw God's glorious majesty. All these sights—*awesome gleam of crystal ... glowing metal ... like fire ... [like a] rainbow* (1:22, 27–28 NASB)—were given to Ezekiel to remind him of how awesome, how glorious, and how indescribably majestic God is! *Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. ... [For] the LORD sits as King forever* (Psalm 29:2, 10b).

Ezekiel saw God's final authority. Seeing God's throne taught him that He was in control (1:25a). Ezekiel was a POW (Prisoner of War); he was surrounded by numerous enemies who had vandalized his home, dragged him away, and savagely ended the lives of thousands of his people. Yet, in the midst of even that, all the fears of life melted in the radiance of God's sovereign throne. And because God is on His throne, the words of this well-loved song hold true: *When peace like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like the sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well, with my soul."*²

Ezekiel saw God's absolute supremacy. The term *high up* really spoke to him because the throne of God is atop all else (1:26b). As Ezekiel saw the destruction of his nation he learned that God is not thwarted by man's disobedience. Though God is grieved and saddened, His plan will not fail. Nothing is beyond His throne or above it. God reigns!

Ezekiel saw God's unveiled glory in Christ. The sight of Christ like *a man* (1:26c) reminds us that our Lord Jesus Christ is ... *the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high ...* (Hebrews 1:3 NASB). Ezekiel got to see Jesus Christ, and now you and I get to see Him in His Book, the Bible.

Ezekiel saw God's unchanging promises. *Like ... a rainbow* (1:28) is given by God as a sign that He keeps His Word. What He says, He will do.

Clearly, we can see that God's servants submit to Him: *...The word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD came upon him* (Ezekiel 1:3 NASB).

Did you know that the Word of the Lord can expressly come to you? I don't mean visions; He wants to talk to you through His Word. Will you let Him speak to you today? If you are God's servant, you will be open to God's Word. This means being attuned to His *still small voice* so that you can obey His directives as Elijah did on the mountaintop after the wind, earthquake, and fire of 1 Kings 19:10–12. Otherwise, you might miss a real treasure from the Lord!

Ezekiel waited for the hand of the Lord to lead him—like these angelic beings who followed the Lord’s leading exactly, and were in concert with Him: *Wherever the spirit was about to go, they would go in that direction. And the wheels rose close beside them; for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels* (Ezekiel 1:20 NASB). I would not want to go anywhere if the hand of the Lord was not on me. Would you? That is what God’s servants are like.

Ezekiel demonstrated being in concert with the Lord through the loss of his lovely wife (16:2) who died (24:16–18). God in His sovereignty took her life as a preaching illustration for Ezekiel to Judah. Though saddened, Ezekiel followed the God of the new heart’s lead to show these people that they needed a new heart. Are you willing to follow His lead regardless of the personal cost?

SATURDAY: Daniel Says to Worship Our God Who Rules

*“This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that **the Most High rules in the kingdom of men**, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men”* (Daniel 4:17, emphasis added).

Some contemporaries of Daniel (605–536 B.C.) were Jeremiah (627–586 B.C.), Habakkuk (612–588 B.C.), and Ezekiel (593–571 B.C.). In God’s opinion of history, the kingdom of Babylon was the richest and most glorious of all the kingdoms of the earth. Babylon was the head of gold in the image God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar. As its realm spread across the then-known world, in its wake it left the dust of crushed opponents foolish enough to challenge God’s chosen instrument of prophesied judgment. Nobody could stop the Babylonians because God was empowering them. As God is performing His purposes through His Word, we should not fight against Him. We must be in step with Him.

To the helm of that incredible empire rose an incredible young man of God, Daniel. Have you ever considered what it must have been like to be prime minister to the greatest empire in the world in its time? There would be untold streams of decisions, endless meetings, countless conferences, lavish banquets, and clay tablet work (like our paperwork). And don’t forget the delays on the freeways in your chariot as well as the everyday needs of life such as going to the sandal shop, stopping to have new wheels put on the chariot, and tending to the needs of the horses.

Daniel was a very responsible man, committed, and most of all *busy*. How did he cope with life at the top? He knelt on his knees three times a day to pray, *just as he always did*. In the midst of his cabinet position in a worldwide empire, and all the pressures that came with such a position, Daniel *faithfully prayed*. Not just at a meal; no, he found a way to stop it all, go to a quiet, private chamber, *kneel*, and come into the presence of God in thanksgiving. When life is tough, when it seems like the bad guys are winning, remember there is a God in heaven who rules!

Having a God in heaven who is in charge should cause each of us to live with *conviction*. Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself (1:8). Why? Because God wants His children to have standards of holiness in their lives.

Make a choice to live in hope. Through the testimonies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, we find living hope to worship our God of salvation, our God of repentance, our God of hope, our God of the new heart, and our God who rules.

As signs of the end of days multiply, never forget that our God rules: ... *There is a God in heaven who ... has made known ... what will be in the latter days ...* (Daniel 2:28). God is in charge! He cares when you are in the midst of the fires in your life: *Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire* (Daniel 3:26). Just as the Most High God walked beside these three servants in the fire, He will also compassionately walk with you through your fiery trials of faith.

Have confidence in Christ (past and future) because our God moves history along: "... *the Most High rules in the kingdom of men ...*" (Daniel 4:17). Because He reigns, it is better to read His Word than to depend upon the news media to interpret what is happening in the world. Then, when you read or hear the news, you will perceive God's hand in it. For that reason, my interest in the news has been declining. The news is bad and crippling for spiritual lives because we can get addicted to it.

As you have communion (constant prayerfulness) with Christ, you will find enduring hope come what may: *In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul* (Psalm 94:19). Like the psalmist, Daniel knew that if he turned to our Sovereign Lord, that he would find help in time of need.

God wants you to bring all your problems and fears to Him: *Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to ... his companions: that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven ..., so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon* (Daniel 2:17–18). In Daniel's night vision, God revealed the secret of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. And Daniel responded in praise: *"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. ... He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding"* (Daniel 2:20, 21c).

All through the ages, saints have worshiped our mighty God who rules. And we now have the privilege of joining our voices with theirs in praise of our merciful and loving God: *Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the LORD is the great God, and the great King above all gods. ... Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand* (Psalm 95:1–3, 6–7).

Once you really see God, nothing else can fully satisfy. Have *you* ever seen Him? The words of this song beautifully capture the heart of a soul who has truly seen God. I hope it represents yours.

O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

*O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!*

*My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread thro' all the earth abroad
The honors of Thy name.*

*Jesus, the name that calms my fears,
That bids my sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears;
'Tis life and health and peace.*

*He breaks the pow'r of canceled sin,
He sets the pris'ner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.*

—Charles Wesley, 1707–1788

Week 23—See Christ in the Old Testament

(From Hosea—Micah; Revelation 4–5)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you see
Christ in the Old Testament—from Hosea to Micah!



SUNDAY: Hosea Says to Worship Our God of Faithfulness

*Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just **like the love of the LORD** for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans” (Hosea 3:1, emphasis added).*

Some contemporaries during the time Hosea (753–715 B.C.) prophesied were Jonah (793–753 B.C.), Amos (760–750 B.C.), Micah (742–687 B.C.), and Isaiah (740–681 B.C.). In all twelve minor prophetic books, from Hosea to Malachi, Christ is our “Promised Son of God.” Each prophet declares that **God is in control**. Indeed, they do more than merely declare it; the sovereign hand of God is visible everywhere. Overspreading the words of these twelve writers is the reality that God is the Sovereign Lord of History. They affirm that nothing happens, either to Israel or to the Gentile nations, that is not the result of His direct determination. The destruction by locusts, in Joel, was God’s doing. Nineveh’s ups (revival with Jonah) and downs (complete destruction in Nahum) were sent from the Lord. When Assyria decimated Israel, and Babylon wiped out Judah, it was God who did it. Any doubts over the precise purpose of God’s actions evaporated the moment they remembered that almighty God was in control.

All the Minor Prophets declare that **God is holy**. It was their comprehension of His utter holiness that was the impetus for their scathing indictments of sin. Wherever sin was found among God’s people or in foreign lands (Edom, as in Obadiah; Assyria, as in Nahum), it was still an affront to the Lord and had to be dealt with. As nowhere else in the Scriptures, sin is denounced and repentance is ardently and earnestly demanded. These prophets declared that without genuine repentance, the judgment of God is inescapable.

The twelve declared that **God is lovingly just**. His love and justice often appear harsh to some, which simply reveals a basic misunderstanding of the perfections of our Lord. The great love of God for His people (even His love for Nineveh) caused Him to send messengers to warn of coming judgment. At the appointed time, if there was no genuine repentance, judgment fell. Sin is always an affront to God; it always destroys, and is always judged. But for His own, the purpose of judgment is to turn the wayward from sin to their rightful Master. These truths must be emphasized as much today as they were 2,800 years ago. Individuals are still sinning and running away from God, just as Israel did. Nations are still offending the righteousness of a holy God, just as Israel did. But, as always, God will restore those who come to Him.

Hosea himself had a life of grief. His only beloved wife, Gomer, was persistently unfaithful to their marriage. This sorrow gave Hosea a unique perspective to speak about the parallel unfaithfulness of Israel for their Lord. The compassionate heart of God, with no diminishing of His holy standard, is seen in the book of Hosea, which paints a powerful portrait of the coming revelation of the love and holiness of God perfectly revealed in Christ. There is moral and spiritual bankruptcy in the nation; sin is unashamedly practiced, and God is abandoned. Worship of the true and living God is replaced by false and lifeless idols. Hosea depicts the inward decay of a collapsing nation. Ultimately, in 722 B.C., Assyria captured and deported the people of the northern kingdom to the area we would now call modern-day Iraq.

Hope helps us to clearly see God's faithfulness in Hosea. We can learn valuable lessons from how God related to His people, and how they responded. For instance, God faithfully warned His people, but Israel forgot their Maker (8:14). However, He never forgot them; rather, God wanted them to remember Him all through their lives. This teaches the value of listening to God. Because Israel faithlessly lived apart from God by their deeds (Hosea 7:2), we are reminded of the importance of following the Lord. Because Israel faithlessly neglected God's Word and stumbled into sin (4:5; 5:5), but didn't even know it (7:8–9) because she became satisfied and forgot God (8:14; 13:6), we are cautioned to not neglect feeding upon His Word.

Israel faithlessly compromised God's plan by mixing with the nations (7:8), which caused them to wander and rebel (7:13). This ultimately led to their going astray by a spirit of harlotry (4:12; 5:4). Yielding to the enticement of "a little compromise" usually leads to full-blown rebellion. We need to obey the Lord.

God faithfully disciplined His disobedient children when they stumbled into sin (4:1; 5:2). He had to chastise them because they transgressed His covenant (6:6–7; 8:1; 13:4). This is true of nations and people alike, and repentance is the only wise choice of action. Hosea thus urged Israel to acknowledge their guilt (5:15), return to the Lord (6:1), know Him (6:3), and wait for Him (12:6).

With that in mind, we should respond daily to God's Word, and never put off obedience until it is more convenient. Listen to God faithfully, follow Him, feed upon His Word, and then respond in loving obedience. If you do, He will bless you for it!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Thank You, dear Lord, for the privilege of looking at many individual books, and just lightly touching on them, but seeing You, Lord Jesus, operative in each one guiding, guarding, blessing, and judging those who would not listen. We want to be blessed and we want Your protection, because we want to obey You with all our heart. With our whole heart, may we seek You. Oh, let us not wander from Your commandments! We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

MONDAY: Joel Says to Worship Our God of Wrath

*Alas for the day! For **the day of the LORD is at hand**; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty* (Joel 1:15, emphasis added).

Joel (835–796 B.C.) was a contemporary prophet with both Elisha (848–797 B.C.) and Jonah (793–753 B.C.). The book of Joel tells of a great plague of insects that came upon the land of Judah as God’s judgment against sin. In the law, God had promised material prosperity to His people for obedience, and adversity for disobedience. The period described in the opening prophecy was one of famine and suffering because an enormous hoard of insects had eaten much of the vegetation. The distress in Judah because of this judgment is seen as a foreshadowing of greater distress in a coming day of greater judgment. That yet-future period is described as “the day of Jehovah,” which may be considered as the theme of the book. “The day of Jehovah” is the time of God’s judgment on the earth in connection with the Second Coming of Christ.

A simple, basic overview of the book of Joel is as follows:

- **Chapter 1—God Seeks Repentance.** Joel was commissioned to declare the lesson needing to be learned from the locust plague. So often the scientific explanation neatly blinds the eyes of people to God’s hand behind the scenes—His ultimate goal being the repentance of His people, which always refers to a “turn about.”
- **Chapter 2—God Gives Revelation.** God alone knows and writes the future in advance. That is one of the exclusive features of the Bible that has set it apart from all other religious books on earth.
- **Chapter 3—God Plans Restoration.** Verses 1–17 are a portrait of universal judgment, moral declension, and physical disaster. Verses 18–21 are a picture of the eternal age—millennial blessing following the judgment of the day of the Lord, and the land, freed from wickedness, is again blessed of God.

Three Benefits of an Eschatological Study: *Eschatological* means “related to the end of the world or the events associated with it.”

1. **Eschatology points us to Christlike living:** *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." ... And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure* (Revelation 19:10; 1 John 3:3).
2. **Eschatology produces hopeful living in us:** *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit* (Romans 15:13).
3. **Eschatology promotes confident living in us:** *... Abide in Him; that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at his coming. ... [For] we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. 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 2:28; 5:19–20).

The Lord wants to use disasters and tragedies, such as the locust plague in Joel, to refocus hearts upon Him. As someone once said, "God whispers to us in our joys, but shouts to us in our sorrows." Is there anything in particular in your life today where God is "shouting" to get your attention? In the Scriptures, repentance and forgiveness are always tightly bound together. It is as simple as this: if we repent, we will be forgiven; if we do not repent, we can't be forgiven.

TUESDAY: Amos Says to Worship Our God of Justice

But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:24, emphasis added).

Some contemporaries with the prophet Amos (760–750 B.C.) were Jonah (793–753 B.C.) and Hosea (753–715 B.C.). Amos prophesied during a period of national optimism in Israel. Business was booming and boundaries were bulging. But below the surface, greed and injustice were festering. Hypocritical religious motions had replaced true worship, creating a false sense of security and a growing callousness to God's disciplining hand. Neither famine, drought, plagues, death, nor destruction was forcing the people to their knees. As Amos (the farmer who became a prophet) visualized the nearness of God's judgment, he unflinchingly lashed out at sin in an effort to mobilize the nation to repentance. The nation, like a basket of rotting fruit, stood ripe for judgment because of its hypocrisy and spiritual indifference.

The name *Amos* is derived from the Hebrew root *amas*, which means "to lift a burden, to carry." Thus, his name means "Burden" or "Burden-Bearer." And he lived up to the meaning of his name by bearing up under his divinely given burden of declaring judgment to rebellious Israel.

Amos ministered after the time of Obadiah, Joel, and Jonah—and just before Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. At this time, Uzziah reigned over a prosperous and militarily successful Judah. He fortified Jerusalem and subdued the Philistines, the Ammonites, and the Edomites. In the north, Israel was ruled by the capable King Jeroboam II. Economic and military circumstances were almost ideal, but prosperity only increased the materialism, immorality, and injustice of the people (2:6–8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:10–12; 8:4–6). During this time period, Assyria, Babylon, Aram, and Egypt were relatively weak. Thus, the people of Israel found it hard to imagine the coming disaster predicted by Amos. However, it was only three decades until the downfall of Israel.

In Amos 1:1–2:16, God explains why He judged the various nations:

- **Damascus** (1:3–5) was judged for **cruelty** (sledges of torture—human rights violations).
- **Gaza** (1:6–8) was judged for **slavery** (slave trafficking—selling people for money).
- **Tyre** (1:9–10) was judged for **dishonesty** (severing a treaty—breaking promises).
- **Edom** (1:11–12) was judged for **vengefulness** (sword of terror—hated her brother).
- **Ammon** (1:13–15) was judged for **violence** (sadistic triumph—cruelty to defenseless).
- **Moab** (2:1–3) was judged for **disrespectfulness** (spoiling tombs—spiteful to the dead).
- **Judah** (2:4–5) was judged for **disobedience** (spurning the Torah—unfaithful to God).
- **Israel** (2:6–16) was judged for **hard-heartedness** (social transgressions—greed-prompted indifference).

In Amos 3:1–6:14 God explains the purpose of the judgment, 7:1–9:10 pictures the judgment, and 9:11–15 predicts the yet-future restoration of Israel and its prosperity. Seven practical lessons can be learned from understanding God’s judgment in this prophecy:

1. God patiently gives the nations time to repent before judgment falls. **The lesson:** Be careful to heed God’s warnings in your own life.
2. God is no respecter of nations; all will be judged for their sin. **The lesson:** Be patient during personal chastisement. A proper response will yield *the peaceable fruit of righteousness* (see Hebrews 12:3–11).
3. When the cup of sin within a nation is full, judgment will be irrevocable. **The lesson:** Be evangelistic while there is still time; point as many as will listen to Christ’s salvation.

4. God is sovereign over all nations, choosing the time of their rise and fall. **The lesson:** Be trusting God for His perfect timing.
5. Nations are held accountable for brutal abuse shown to countries captured in war. **The lesson:** Be praying!
6. God's standards for judging nations are similar, but the results differ. **The lesson:** Be cautious in your responses to world events.
7. God brings judgment on leaders and nations who perpetrate fraud, oppression, and violence against their people. **The lesson:** Be righteous in all your dealings, and especially with the poor.

We live in somber times, and must seriously deal with sin lest our usefulness for Christ be hampered. Here is the key to lasting victory: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–22).

WEDNESDAY: Obadiah Says to Worship Our God of Humility

*“The pride of your heart has deceived you ...; You who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’ Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there **I will bring you down,**” says the LORD* (Obadiah 3–4, emphasis added).

Obadiah (853–840 B.C.) was a contemporary with Elijah (875–848 B.C.), Micah (865–830 B.C.), and Jehu (855–840 B.C.). As A. M. Hodgkin writes, “Between the Gulf of Akaba and the Dead Sea lies a range of precipitous red sandstone heights, known as Mount Seir. Here Esau settled after he had despised his birthright, and his descendants, having driven out the Horites (Gen. 15:6), occupied the whole of the mountain (Deut. 2:12). The capital city Selah, or Petra, ‘Rock,’ was a city unique in its kind amid the works of man. Perched like an eagle’s nest (ver. 4) amid inaccessible mountain fortresses, the dwellings were mostly caves, hewn out of the soft rock (ver. 3, 6), and placed where you could scarce imagine a human foot could climb.”¹

The story of Esau and Jacob is that of twin brothers, sons of Isaac and Rebekah. They were not identical twins; actually, they were opposites (see Genesis 25:24–34). Esau despised his birthright. The man who had the birthright was in contact with God; he was the priest of his family; he was the man who had a covenant from God; the man who had a relationship with God. In effect Esau said, “I would rather have a bowl of soup than have a relationship with God.”

Having seen Esau in the first book of the Old Testament, look now at the last book of the Old Testament and read this strange language: *“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” Says the LORD. “Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated ...”* (Malachi 1:2–3a). This is a strange thing for God to say: “I loved Jacob and I hated Esau.” The explanation for that is in the little book of Obadiah where God said to Edom, *“The pride of your heart has deceived you ...”* (1:3).

Christ is the model of humility. James Boice points out, “But there is this to add. It is true that the sin of Edom, long indulged, worked itself into the very character of the people and therefore inevitably flowed on in history. But that same flow of history also brought one who lived by an entirely different standard.”² There was a day in history when two kings confronted one another for the first time. One was an earthly king. He sat that day at the pinnacle of power. His name was Herod Antipas. Herod was a son of Herod the Great, who was an Edomite (or an Idumean, as the New Testament lists it). Herod the Great had slaughtered the babes of Bethlehem in his desire to exterminate Christ. His successor, Antipas, with whom we are concerned, was no better. He had beheaded John the Baptist and had been called *“that fox”* by Jesus (Luke 13:32). Antipas had everything he wanted. His income, expressed in American money in 2006, would be in excess of six million dollars a year. All the pleasures of life were his. If anyone stood in his way ... well, the life of that person meant as little to him as the lives of the innocents of Bethlehem had meant to his father. The motto of his reign was: “What will it profit *me*?”

The other king was Jesus. He was the King of Kings, One who, according to the flesh, was the natural heir to David’s throne and who, according to His divine nature, was the Supreme King over all the kings of this earth. But He did not look like a king. He stood in humble clothing. He had been rejected. Within hours He was to die a felon’s death. If Jesus had wished, He could have called forth legions of angels who would have vindicated His cause instantly and have swept the usurper Herod from the throne. But Jesus did not want the throne in that way. He did not want the throne until you and I could share it with Him. To make that possible He would die.

Herod said, “What does it profit *me*?” Jesus said, “What can I do that will be the greatest possible benefit to My brethren?” God vindicated Jesus. Jesus went to the cross. He died. But His death was followed by a resurrection, and today He lives to enable those who believe in Him to behave as He did and bring a true, supernatural brotherhood to this world. For his part, Herod went on with his revelry but soon was banished to Lyons, France, where he died in misery.³

This is the choice before us: go Herod’s way or Jesus’ way. We cannot do both. God wants to break us of pride because pride competes with God for control and glory. He therefore offers us actions that promote the growth of humility in our lives. I call these the “Three R’s of Spiritual Growth”:

- **Refocus:** *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up* (James 4:10).

- **Remove:** ... *Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly ..., looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works* (Titus 2:12–14).
- **Request God's humility:** ... *Younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time* (1 Peter 5:5–6).

Pride is the root of all sin, but humility is the root of all virtue. Pride leads to destruction (Proverbs 16:18), but humility brings blessings and honor from the Lord. Which category most represents your life's present testimony?

THURSDAY: Jonah Says to Worship Our God of Mercy

"Should I not pity Nineveh ... in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?" (Jonah 4:11).

Jonah (793–753 B.C.) was a contemporary with Joel (853–796 B.C.) and Amos (760–750 B.C.). Our Lord God Almighty is both a chastening and a merciful seeking God (Jonah 1:1–2a). Out of the countless lives that have crossed the pages of time, we find two blips on the radar screen of eternity—seemingly insignificant to all but God. Eight centuries before Christ, a great storm swirled around a nameless boat somewhere in the Mediterranean. By all counts, it should have swamped that boat and sent the nameless mariners to the black depth of the sea to await judgment day.

Amazingly, these sinking sailors did not perish. Rather, they were miraculously rescued from harm by the Master of the ocean, earth, and skies. Of all places—sleeping in the dark, creaking, hold was an evangelist. Shaken awake by the terrified captain, questioned by shouted words over the fury of the storm, he spoke. And in Jonah 1:9 the disobedient rebel showed his heart. Asked to go east, he turned west. Told to rescue inland Ninevah, he sought the sea route to the furthestmost western city known in his day—Tarshish, in western Spain.

In Jonah 1:3–9, we learn that there is folly in running from God, but power in speaking for God. It is almost humorous that, in spite of his persistence in disobeying the Lord and the breach of divine fellowship that it must have produced, Jonah gave a powerful testimony. Though Jonah's actions were wrong, his heart couldn't hide the Word of God for long—it just came out. And in all His power, God spoke to them. You see, the Scriptures are God speaking. When you share them, the voice of God is unleashed. The Bible is the unsheathed sword of the Spirit. So he said

to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9). *Nine words* that strike harder than the gale howling about them. It penetrates deeper than the cold sea spraying their faces and stinging their eyes. For you see, the Word can penetrate the very soul of mankind. He may have been endeavoring to resign his commission, but he could not change his heart, which remained that of a true prophet. So he pointed these mariners to the only Lord God.⁴

The God Who Will Not Let Go: After Jonah gave his testimony (1:9), the sailors were *exceedingly afraid* (1:10). We have already been told once that the men were frightened of the storm. But why were the men so frightened at this point—apparently more than they were of the storm itself? They knew about Jonah’s God. These men had traveled from port to port around the Mediterranean Sea, hearing many stories of other people and their gods. Are we to think they had never heard of the Hebrew people, or of the Hebrew God, Jehovah? Of course, they had heard of Him!

The sailors had probably heard these reports: Jehovah was the God who brought down the plagues on Egypt so that His people might be led out. He parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape into the desert, and then closed the waters on the pursuing Egyptian forces. He led the Hebrews in the wilderness for forty years, protecting them by a cloud that spread out over their encampment. By day, that cloud gave them shade, but at night it turned into a pillar of fire to give them light and heat. He provided manna to eat and water to drink. Jehovah parted the waters of the Jordan River to enable the Israelites to cross over into Canaan, and He leveled the walls of Jericho for them. Amazingly, He also caused the sun to stand still at Gibeon so that Joshua would have time to achieve a full victory over the fleeing Amorites. On and on the stories could have gone ... It is no wonder that these sailors feared Jonah’s God!

The Great God of the Hebrews: A weak god was not pursuing this boat and its hapless mariners; it was the great God of the Hebrews, and for the sake of Jonah. Oh, how they were terrified! ... “*What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?*”—*for the sea was growing more tempestuous* (1:11). They were unable to escape the fury of the storm, so they cried out to the Lord in fear: “*We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You*” (1:14). After the men threw Jonah into the sea, they ... *feared* [reverenced] *the LORD exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows* (1:15–16). The mariners were gloriously converted by our merciful God.

What happened after that? After a whale of a journey (2:1–10), chapter 3 shows Jonah arriving in Nineveh, preaching God’s message. Then *the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them* (3:5). The king decreed that everyone was to turn from their evil ways in the hope that God would turn away His fierce anger, and He did (3:7–10). Jonah, however, was displeased with God’s mercy, and became angry.

The Danger of Anger and Hasty Decisions: When we get angry at God, we often make the same serious mistakes Jonah made. What were they? He quit; he made a private retreat and became a *spectator*. In 4:9–10, God rebuked Jonah for his lack of compassion for the people of Nineveh. Jonah 4:11 reveals the heights of God’s mercy when he had pity on that great city

because of its 120,000 small children—those “*who cannot discern between their right hand and their left.*”

We need to understand this truth: what God is going to do, He will do. If He has determined to save Mary Jones, God will save Mary Jones. If He has determined to save John Smith, God will save John Smith. Moreover, those whom He saves will never perish; neither will anyone pluck them out of Christ’s hand (John 10:28). But note that God can do this through the obedience of His children, as He does later with Nineveh through Jonah, in which case they share in the blessing. Or He can do it through His children’s disobedience, as we see here through Jonah’s selfishness, in which case they miss the blessing. Either way, God blesses those whom He will bless, but the one case involves happiness for His people while the other involves misery.

Which represents your case? Are you resisting Him? Are you refusing His Great Commission? Or are you obeying Him in this and in all other matters?

Perhaps you are not yet a Christian. If not, learn from God’s wonderful grace to the sailors. You have not yet perished in your godless state because God, who made the sea around you and the dry land on which you walk, preserves you. But do not remain indifferent to Him; turn to Him on the basis of the perfect sacrifice for sin made once by His own Son, Jesus Christ. Then follow Him throughout your days.

FRIDAY: Micah Says to Worship Our God of Righteousness

*What does the LORD require of you but to **do justly**, to **love mercy**, and to **walk humbly** with your God?* (Micah 6:8, emphasis added).

Micah (742–687 B.C.) was a contemporary with Hosea (753–715 B.C.) and Isaiah (740–681 B.C.). Although Micah was a contemporary with the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah was a court poet, but Micah was from a small village. Isaiah was a statesman, a herald to kings, but Micah was an evangelist and social reformer. He was God’s messenger to the misfortunate, oppressed common people. Micah’s message, however, like Isaiah’s, is one of hope. Both speak of the birth of the coming Messiah and the salvation He would bring. And in two of the most remarkable passages in all Scripture, both speak, almost word for word, of Israel’s future and the coming glorious earthly reign of the Messiah (Isaiah 2:2–4; Micah 4:1–3). Only seven chapters long, Micah’s message contains some of the most familiar passages in all of Scripture. For example, the prophet announces the place of the Messiah’s birth: “*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting*” (5:2).

One deeply impactful truth Micah points out is that as the leaders go, so go the people. He says that Jerusalem’s leaders *judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money* (3:11).

Micah points to Jesus Christ as the only answer to the world’s problems. The poor, the oppressed, and the misfortunate have the “*one who breaks open [and] will come up before them*

...” (2:13). Christ the Messiah breaks through the obstacles in the path ahead. In the future He will do this for Israel, when the remnant is gathered into the fold. But today He helps us through our perplexing paths, as we trust in Him.

Messiah’s kingdom will come (4:1–8), and Jerusalem will be its center (4:1–2). Peace will reign. Nations ... *shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore* (4:3). Prosperity will abound, each will ... *sit under his vine and ... fig tree ...* (4:4). God will be central as ... *we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever* (4:5). The same God who brings heaven to earth can bring solutions to our problems today.

What does God want from us in exchange? Micah answers that we are ... *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with [our] God* (6:8). No one is exempt. We are to be clothed with Christ, according to God’s expectations of us. We are to live the truth and look to Jesus!

SATURDAY: The Promised Son

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet **out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel**, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2, emphasis added).

Micah’s reference to Bethlehem prompts us to reflect upon Isaiah’s and Micah’s prophecies concerning the Messiah and the salvation He would bring. Almost word for word, they spoke of Israel’s future and the coming glorious earthly reign of the Messiah (Isaiah 2:2–4; Micah 4:1–3).

Just as Micah had prophesied around 700 years before Jesus came, the little town of Bethlehem was indeed the birth place of the Messiah—the One who would be “*Ruler in Israel*”—the One “*whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting*” (Micah 5:2)! At Christmas, we should therefore not only reflect upon the “eternal God’s incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ” but also “His millennial reign as King of Kings (cf. Is. 9:6).”⁵

This Jesus Christ, the promised one, was foretold by Isaiah in language that has been heralded as one of the most beloved prophetic Christmas passages ever. In fact, Handel’s “Messiah” so captures the beauty and heart of Isaiah 9:6–7 that I would not be surprised to hear this glorious music in the worship center of the universe! As you read through these words once more, worship the One of whom it speaks!

*“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.
 Of the increase of His government and peace
 There will be no end,
 Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
 To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
 From that time forward, even forever.
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”*

From this prophetic passage, we can conclude: “The Son will rule the nations of the world (Rev. 2:27; 19:15). ... The Messiah will be a Father to His people eternally. As Davidic King, He will compassionately care for and discipline them (Isaiah 40:11; 63:16; 64:8; Pss. 68:5,6; 103:13; Prov. 3:12). The government of Immanuel will procure and perpetuate peace among the nations of the world (Isaiah 2:4; 11:6–9; Mic. 4:3).”⁶ There is a glorious future in Christ that is yet to come, as our study in Revelation is revealing, but only if you personally grab hold of the eternal God’s purpose for His incarnation, which is to “... *save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

God had made a promise to David that one of his descendants would have an eternal reign, and God always remembers His oaths. When the perfect time had come, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and announced: “[Mary] *will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Isaiah], saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated “God with us” (Matthew 1:21–23).

What was foretold regarding the Messiah was also affirmed through the angel Gabriel, when he told Mary about the Son she was to miraculously bear: “*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end*” (Luke 1:32–33). So when the light of Christ burst forth upon the darkness of this world the night of His birth, a multitude of the heavenly host joyfully sang God’s praises: “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward [all] men!*” (Luke 2:14). This is the gospel, which is meant for everyone.

Jesus Christ came to earth to bring “*liberty to the captives*” (Luke 4:18), and that was the message He preached at His hometown synagogue. Christ’s salvation is offered to all who are in bondage to sin and death. We are powerless to set ourselves free; only Jesus, the Lamb of God, could pay the price necessary for our redemption (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18–21). As Warren Wiersbe has said, “When you trust Jesus as Savior, you are delivered from Satan’s power, moved into God’s kingdom, redeemed, and forgiven (Col. 1:12–14).”⁷

Make a choice to live in hope. Jesus' birth was the dawning of a new day that knows no night, for our night was ended by His light: *"Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace"* (Luke 1:78-79).

Dayspring means "sunrise." God's Word sees lost people as those sitting in darkness, death, and distress. However, Christ's birth brought light, life, and peace. Jesus came into a manger one dark night to bear away the sin of the world. If you will ask Him, He will take your penalty, your debt, your stain, your sin. The story of Christmas is that the Sunrise has come! And the story of Revelation is that this same Jesus is coming again, and soon! Are you ready? You can find living hope for the end of days by opening your heart today to Christ!

If you are already a child of God, read the words of this ancient Christmas hymn and worship your eternal God Incarnate through the wonderful titles ascribed to Him throughout the Old Testament: Wisdom, Emmanuel, The Lord of Might, The Rod of Jesse, Day Spring, and the Key of David!

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
O come, O come, Thou Lord of might who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
in ancient times didst give the law in cloud and majesty and awe.
O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell Thy people save and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here;
O drive away the shades of night and pierce the clouds and bring us light.
O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heav'nly home where
all Thy saints with Thee shall dwell—O come, O come, Emmanuel!
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*—Latin origin from c. 12th century
Tr. by John M. Neale, 1818–1866*

Week 24—See Christ in the Old Testament

(From Nahum—Malachi; Revelation 4–5)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you see
Christ in the Old Testament—from Nahum to Malachi!



SUNDAY: Nahum Says to Worship Our God of Judgment

*The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him. ... What do you conspire against the LORD? **He will make an utter end of it.** Affliction will not rise up a second time (Nahum 1:7, 9).*

Nahum (663–612 B.C.) was a contemporary with Zephaniah (640–621 B.C.). Two of the Minor Prophets, Jonah and Nahum, wrote their books totally about Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Over a century before Nahum, Jonah spoke on God's behalf to the Ninevites and, from the king on down, they repented, at least for a season. Initially, they appeared grateful for His mercy. However, not too long afterward they presumptuously began to live in even greater wickedness than before.

The Assyrian monarch may have been checked by God in 701 B.C., but these were still great days for Nineveh. Sennacherib more than doubled the city's size, making it the world's largest city at that time. "A wall surrounded the inner city eight miles in circumference. It was one hundred feet high and so wide that three chariots could race around it abreast. It had twelve hundred towers and fourteen gates. Beyond this was a much longer, outer wall. There was an inner city, an outer city, and what we would call extensive suburbs beyond that. In Jonah this wide expanse was termed a "three days" journey (Jonah 3:3)."¹

In their tremendous pride, wealth, and power, the Ninevites saw no need of God. They thus made a grave error in thinking of the Lord as being *slow to anger* but failing to recognize that *God is jealous* and *will take vengeance on His adversaries ...* (Nahum 1:2–3a). As Boice has well said, "There is one inescapable fact of the Universe: the wrath of God may not be evaded. It is so great

that it hunted down and sacrificed no less than the Son of God, Christ Jesus! And if God spared not His Son, what will happen to the rebels at the Day of Judgment?”²

Nahum’s prophecy concerning Nineveh’s doom has three main parts. In chapter 1, God’s judgment on Nineveh is determined; chapter 2 describes its destruction; chapter 3 reveals that judgment is deserved. Nahum, whose name means *comfort*, found solace in knowing that our sovereign, righteous God of judgment is in absolute control, and that He would right all wrongs in due season. Therefore, He worshiped our perfect God of judgment’s character, as reflected in these verses:

- **Nahum worshiped by respecting God’s vengeance:** *God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; ... He reserves wrath for His enemies ...* (Nahum 1:2).
- **Nahum worshiped by trusting God’s patience:** *The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked ...* (Nahum 1:3).
- **Nahum worshiped by resting in God’s omnipotence:** *Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? ...* (Nahum 1:6).
- **Nahum worshiped by waiting for God’s good justice:** *The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him. ... Behold, ... the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! ... For the wicked one shall no more pass through you; he is utterly cut off* (Nahum 1:7, 15).

“That this prophecy of Nahum actually *is* a product of Divine inspiration, and not just a vehement thirst for human revenge, is made sure, of course, by the fact that it was fulfilled to the very letter. And in these days when monstrosities of wickedness terrorize the earth, on a scale never known before, when Christian and godly and innocent people in many lands suffer coldly calculated or brutally inflicted cruelties for the sake of upright principles, it is a thoroughly Christian attitude to pray for and to take refuge in the soon-coming final vengeance of God on the wicked, and His vindication of the upright”³

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, we are so thankful that You have chosen to call us Your beloved. As You said through Malachi, “I have loved you.” I pray that of all things we would worship You, the God of love—that You may be pleased to acknowledge Your ownership of us. Help us to be less acquainted with the evil going on around us and more acquainted with Your righteous holiness within us in Your Word. May we be in Your Word regularly, respond to Your Word, speak for You, and see You at all times! May the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ rest upon us. In His precious name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Habakkuk Says to Worship Our God of Sovereignty

*Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the LORD, **I will joy in the God of my salvation.** The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills ... (Habakkuk 3:17–19, emphasis added).*

Habakkuk (612–588 B.C.) was a contemporary with Jeremiah (627–586 B.C.), Daniel (605–536 B.C.), and Ezekiel (593–571 B.C.). God is watching us as we live in a nation suffering the same disease that ancient Israel suffered—a collective societal amnesia about our spiritual heritage. In ancient Israel it had to do with closing the temple down, hiding the Law of God, and neglecting His worship. In America it is found in the growing skepticism about objective truth. It is the dismantling of language, texts, and history to the point that history is eroded; society thus has no tradition and disintegrates! This is the proven lesson of history: when a godly nation turns from its spiritual heritage, judgment is inevitable and inescapable.

Listen to what the mighty prophet Habakkuk had to say:

- Chapter 1—**The burdened prophet talked to his sovereign God.** He asked some tough questions, such as: “Why do You, oh God, allow evil to continue?” Habakkuk concluded: God raises up adversaries to punish the wicked (vv. 5–11). But that raised another difficult question in his mind: “Why do You punish evil by using someone far more wicked?” (vv. 12–17).
- Chapter 2—**The bended prophet listened to his sovereign God.** He took his weighty problem to the Lord and patiently awaited His reply (vv. 1–4). In verses 5–20, he saw the perils of the wicked in which five woes were pronounced against sins. Habakkuk concluded: the righteous live by faith as a way of life, but the wicked have no hiding place.
- Chapter 3—**The blessed prophet praised his sovereign God.** Through prayer, he was comforted as he praised God for His great person (3:1–2), His glorious power (3:3–15), and His gracious plan (3:16–19). Habakkuk concluded: hope in God despite any hopeless situation.

What can we learn from Habakkuk? We should tremble at God's Word: *When I heard, my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones; and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops (Habakkuk 3:16).*

God expects each of His children to praise His holy name. The Scriptures teach that we can do so through echoing His attributes and His actions. One way to do this is by affirming these action truths before the Lord: *When I am burdened, I will talk to You; when I am bended, I will listen to You; when I am blessed, I will praise You!*

TUESDAY: Zephaniah Says to Worship Our God of Hope

*“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, emphasis added).

Zephaniah (640–621 B.C.) was a contemporary with Jeremiah (627–586 B.C.). The Minor Prophets often seem to have a despairing tone. Evil appears to run unchecked. The wicked die, apparently unaccountable for their deeds of cruelty and greed. God’s people fail to obey. Death takes them all away. But there is a light in the distance; rays of hope stream from the promise that the righteous judge will make all things right some day. And on the horizon is a brand-new world. Impossible? No, God has already planned the ending. Zephaniah traced a bit of it in his closing words.

Because Zephaniah is a summary of the previous prophets, his content and style are very similar to the other eight. To best learn from Zephaniah, let’s focus on the third chapter where we see “the Lord in the midst.” Chapter 3 contains a beautiful spiritual lesson. It describes the sinful condition of a soul apart from Christ (vv. 1–2). Those who should have been leaders in righteousness are leaders in iniquity: the princes, judges, prophets, and priests. So the Lord Himself takes the place of these leaders, and we see Him “in the midst,” fulfilling each office in turn.

Like Zephaniah, we can truly worship our God of hope:

- **Christ is our perfect judge**—who first comes to our hearts to convict us of all that is sinful there, and to bring His perfect judgment to light (3:5–7).
- **Christ is our perfect prophet**—who comes to teach us to call upon His name with pure lips. Still “in the midst,” He deals with the pride of heart, and brings us low into the place of blessing, in the presence of His holiness (3:8–13).
- **Christ is our perfect King**—who comes “into our midst” as King, to reign in undisputed sway in the heart that is surrendered to Him. When the Lord fully reigns, the song thus begins (3:14–16).
- **Christ is our perfect High Priest**—who is “in the midst” as our Great High Priest, bringing us into the place of communion with Himself (3:17).

Trusting God in Zephaniah: The third chapter closes with the six beautiful “I wills” of what the Lord will do for us:

1. *“I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly, who are among you, to whom its reproach is a burden”* (v. 18). God looks for genuine contrition over sin!
2. *“I will deal with all who afflict you ...”* (v. 19a). God deals with our adversaries in His time!
3. *“I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out ...”* (v. 19b). God is the defender of the weak!
4. *“I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame”* (v. 19c). God will give back for all we have lost for Him!
5. *“I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you ...”* (v. 20a). God has the timing and sequence of His kingdom plans all in order!
6. *“I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,” says the LORD.* (v. 20b). God has chosen to restore Israel to the head of the nations in the Millennium!

Like Zephaniah, worship Christ, our God of hope, with your whole heart. Ask Him daily: “What can I do for *You*, oh Lord?” Then give Him your *all*.

WEDNESDAY: Haggai Says to Worship Our God of Sacrifice

*“Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: “**Consider your ways!**”* (Haggai 1:4–5, emphasis added).

Haggai (520 B.C.) was a contemporary with Zechariah (520-480 B.C.). There are defining moments that have shaped the course of history, and we remember many of them. For example, when Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River (taking his legions inside “the line of no crossing”), he set the stage for the Roman Empire as we know it. Young Martin Luther’s hammer on the Wittenburg church doors rang out a message that altered the course of the church to this day. When Hitler invaded Danzig at the end of August, 1939, it was England’s response that has shaped western history for the past nearly sixty years. Likewise, in redemptive history (the history of God’s work in people), the response of the Jews to a message they heard on September 1, 520 B.C. (the modern equivalent of the date Haggai gives in 1:1) shaped the course of biblical

history. In twenty-three short days, what had not happened in sixteen long years took place—the second temple was started. The first temple (Solomon's) was destroyed in 586 B.C. Later, Herod did not build a new temple but expanded and embellished the second (Zerubbabel's temple). So this was the beginning of the temple of Christ, the apostles, and of A.D. 70's destruction—a great turning point in history!

There are seven timeless truths about God that we can trace from the pages of Haggai:

1. **The Lord we love is powerful.** In this short book, the Lord is called by a name of His power—*“the Lord of Hosts”*—which was Haggai's favorite name for God. In using this name, our Lord God Almighty reveals the vastness of His control.
2. **The Lord we love is jealous:** *“Thus speaks the LORD ‘This people says, ‘The time has not come ... that the LORD’s house should be built.’” Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” (Haggai 1:2–4).* The Lord often uses the name *Jealous* to describe Himself. He expects to be given top priority, regardless of what is going on in our lives.
3. **The Lord we love is expecting a response from us:** *“You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says the LORD of hosts. “Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house” (Haggai 1:9).*
4. **The Lord we love is trustworthy:** *“According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!” (Haggai 2:5).*
5. **The Lord we love is changeless:** *“‘The glory of this latter Temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:9).* The Lord is the same *“yesterday, today, and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8). He is not tied to our museums of past greatness. God wants to live powerfully in and through us *today*.
6. **The Lord we love is blessing:** *“Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you” (Haggai 2:19).* Though He had to judge their past sins, there is blessing on the horizon.
7. **The Lord we love is personal:** *“‘In that day,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,’ says the LORD, ‘and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:23).* After

the word of wrath coming on the nations, the Lord assured an individual named Zerubbabel that he would be specially used of the Lord. God has big plans for each of us. Don't miss His plans for you!

The Lord we love—our great God of sacrifice—is powerful, jealous, trustworthy, changeless, and personal. And this wonderful Lord expects a response from us: worship. When we give Him the honor in our lives that He deserves, He loves to pour out His blessings upon us! Where does He rank in your own priorities?

THURSDAY: Zechariah Says to Worship Our God Who Jealousy Seeks Attention

“Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Return to Me,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts’” (Zechariah 1:3, emphasis added).

Zechariah (520 B.C.) was a contemporary with Haggai (520 B.C.). Zechariah is the second of the final three prophets of the Old Testament. His name means “God remembers.” Because each word of the Bible is inspired, this offers us a theme of the book. Unlike the thunder of Haggai, his contemporary, Zechariah, gave comforting messages of encouragement. Born as the son of a priest during the Babylonian exile, he seems to have been an orphan. He was called the son of Iddo, who was his grandfather.

Returning with the faithful remnant numbering 42,360 individuals under Zerubbabel, he joined those who came to restore the temple worship of the Lord. His ministry dates to the second year of the King of Persia named Darius Hystaspes (521–520 B.C.). This dates his ministry to two months after Haggai stood at the ruins of the temple and preached his first prophetic sermon.

Just like Haggai, God burdened Zechariah for the neglected repair of the temple. However, God extended his prophetic view far beyond the Jews of his day. God sent him on a prophetic voyage that travels to the very end of redemptive history. He was given detailed insights surrounding the events of the coming Messiah, the Tribulation, the golden millennial age of Israel, and the reign of Christ. Because Bible teachers of the magnitude of Martin Luther believed that God was through with the Jews, they concluded that all of this had to be describing the church. Thus, they chose to not write on some parts of Zechariah's book.

Making Choices to Live in Hope: We can choose today to reflect truths from this great Old Testament prophet that can change us.

- **Sin will bring God's judgment:** *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap* (Galatians 6:7). Pause and examine your heart. Is there a sin that you are trying to hide? Since God sees all things, instead of

trying to hide it, turn from it in your heart by seeing sin as primarily against God. Do not blame anyone for your sin; tell God that you have sinned against Him and want to stop. Ask for cleansing grace to start over. Then decide to obey even the little things that God reveals.

- **God's past dealings with sin should cause us to repent:** *"The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented [turned from sin] at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here"* (Matthew 12:41). Since God has told us that He resists us when we cling to sin in any form, speak to Him and say that you want to love Him and serve Him more than anything else. Remember that there are only two choices we can make in each decision of life—pleasing God or pleasing ourselves. Only what is done for God through Christ will last!
- **Turning from sin brings blessing:** *"Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Return to Me," says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts'"* (Zechariah 1:3). Even the most wicked, like Ahab, found mercy in turning. Manasseh, likewise, was forgiven (2 Chronicles 33:9–13). The instant we forsake sin we are blessed, the Spirit of God flows again through our lives, and we experience the new beginning that is our spiritual heritage in Christ. Do not wait; seek Him and find Him right now. Bow and yield, ask and receive.
- **God, like His Word, can never be evaded for long:** *"Yet surely My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they returned and said: 'Just as the LORD of hosts determined to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds, so He has dealt with us'"* (Zechariah 1:6). God is not mocked and He is full of pardon. He delights in forgiving, cleansing, and giving us a fresh start. He longs to live the best life through us that is possible. Just give the helm to Him, and walk in obedience today.

FRIDAY: Malachi Says to Worship the God of Our First Love

"I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved ..." (Malachi 1:2, emphasis added).

Malachi (430 B.C.) was a contemporary with Ezra. In Malachi we find the last words from God in the Old Testament—words of His love! Last words are very important. Christ's last words contained His legacy for us, His body, the church. Our God is a God of love; He has shown that

love ever since He came on a search and rescue mission to the Garden of Eden. As soon as Adam and Eve had fallen, God came to their rescue. And He loves with the same depth today.

Malachi is all about loving God, and what He expects from His special people. In just a glance at the book, we can see many problems among those special people, so the Lord points out and questions them about key areas lacking in their lives.

If you read Malachi section by section, you will find powerful spiritual lessons that teach about responding to the love of God (1:1–5), honoring the love of God (1:6–2:9), exposing God’s unloving people (2:10–16), trusting the love of God 2:17–3:6), and acknowledging God’s loving ownership (3:7–12).

In Malachi 3:7–8, God calls it theft when we disregard His ownership of our lives: “... *You have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,*” says the LORD of hosts. “*But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.*” The whole tithe is an expression of God’s ownership, or giving of ourselves back to God. Anything less is denying His complete title deed to us. God wants us to see Christ the crucified as the glorious King of Kings, and to rest beneath His wings as we worship our God of first love who owns us.

Because He bought us at such a high price (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), we should give ourselves completely to Him. In Malachi 3:10–12, the Lord is saying that if you give all, and hold nothing back (unlike Ananias and Sapphira of Acts 5), He will “*open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.*”

The Old Testament prophets all spoke of seeing Christ as the One who rules our lives. He is the One whom we can trust to carry out everything. He is our God of hope, the One who will bring everything to pass just as He promised.

We have now come to the end of our study of the last twelve books of the Old Testament—a time when God’s people fluctuated between listening, and refusing to listen, to the prophets of God. I pray that you have truly seen Jesus Christ in these books of prophecy and have worshiped Him all through these weeks!

The Inter-Testamental Period: After Malachi came the Inter-Testamental Period, which was the 400 years between Malachi and Matthew. Many call these years the “silent period” because of the absence of any new inspired scriptures; however, those years are far from silent because God’s Word mapped out the events of the entire period in advance.

From studying this period, we learn that the Jews were triumphant as they kept the Word, but were defeated when they lost sight of it. During this time, the four main Jewish religious groups of Christ’s day developed: the Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots. Additionally, the Apocrypha and the conclusion of Nehemiah, Ezra, and Malachi’s ministry is clearly recorded. Finally, we see the fulfillment of the most explicit and detailed of all the Old Testament prophecies involving Christ’s coming after His herald, John the Baptist, prepares the way. And out of

those dark days came some bright saints: Joseph and Mary, Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna.

God always has His servants in every generation who speak for Him, and speaking for God *always* brings great blessings! Are you one of His servants in *this* generation who speaks for Him?

SATURDAY: Finishing Life Fruitfully for Jesus

*And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and **the Holy Spirit was upon him**. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ* (Luke 2:25–26, emphasis added).

Malachi ends with the promise of Elijah who would turn the hearts of the people back to God. We now know that John the Baptist was that Elijah (Luke 1:15–17). Therefore, Dr. Luke, whose writings actually begin the New Testament chronologically, records the bridge to the Old Testament by taking us first to the angel Gabriel's appearance to John's father, Zacharias, as he served in the temple. *Zacharias* means "God remembers" and *Elizabeth* (John's mother) means "His oath," so together their names mean "God remembers His oath." Zacharias and Elizabeth are models of how to go on in spite of what others might call extraordinary challenges. (Week 51 will cover a more in-depth look at this godly couple.)

Now let us look at two exemplary saints who came out of dark days: Simeon and Anna. They give us one of the clearest examples of how to finish life fruitfully for Jesus.

Simeon was filled with the Spirit. He was Spirit-filled and Spirit-led—a just and devout man who patiently waited for the *Consolation of Israel* because God had promised that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:25–26). He was Spirit-led, having come to the temple at the precise time Jesus' parents brought Him to fulfill *the custom of the law* (v. 27). Simeon was then Spirit-satisfied: *he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word ..."* (Luke 2:28–29).

Warren Wiersbe tells us, "The word *depart* in the Greek has several meanings, and each of them tells us something about the death of a Christian. It means to release a prisoner, to untie a ship and set sail, to take down a tent (see 2 Cor. 5:1–8), and to yoke a beast of burden (see Matt. 11:28–30). God's people are not afraid of death because it only frees us from the burdens of this life and leads into the blessings of the next life."¹ In the end, because we know he was a genuine believer, Simeon was also Spirit-sealed: *"For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel"* (Luke 2:30–32). So Simeon departed from the pages of God's Word—having finished life fruitfully for Jesus.

Anna faithfully waited and worshiped. She, too, finished life fruitfully for Jesus. What do we see in her rare life as a prophetess? She lived out the scriptural pattern for ending life pleasing to God.

In Luke 2:36–37, we see that Anna was what God wanted her to be. She had grown old, but kept on serving right where God had called her to serve—even if it wasn't much by others' estimation. Although she had known pain, she never gave in to despair, disillusionment, and bitterness. She kept on trusting the Lord as a widow, and gave what she had.

Anna fasted and prayed night and day, continually praising the Lord. When she saw an answer to her prayers, she gave thanks immediately (Luke 2:38b). Anna shared Jesus with others by speaking of what God was doing in her life, and telling all about Him to those who looked for redemption (Luke 2:38b).

What guide did Simeon and Anna follow? These two notable lives were the result of believing and following God's Word. Psalm 92:12–15 is a passage they both knew well, and lived: *The righteous shall flourish Those who are planted in the house of the LORD ... shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*

Make a choice to live in hope. Simeon and Anna modeled how to finish life fruitfully for Jesus because they lived a life that counted. A fruitful life that pleases God is a chosen path. What pathway are you choosing to live?

I pray that you will decide to let God overflow your life with His grace. Affirm the goodness of God, for He is upright; He is our Rock; He is good! Make the goodness of the Lord your life-long testimony and you will possess living hope for the end of days.

Remember: what we are going to wear in eternity is what we wore on earth: *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).

It is not the length of time we serve that matters most, but the depth of our passion for Him as we finish our race. Plan now how you want to end the race.

As you conclude this week of devotions, prayerfully think about the implication of these words that most of us have sung to God:

All for Jesus

*All for Jesus, all for Jesus!
All my being's ransomed pow'rs:
All my thoughts and words and doings,
All my days and all my hours.*

*Let my hands perform His bidding,
Let my feet run in His ways;
Let my eyes see Jesus only,
Let my lips speak forth His praise.*

*Since my eyes were fixed on Jesus,
I've lost sight of all beside,
So enchained my spirit's vision,
Looking at the Crucified.*

*What wonder! how amazing!
Jesus, glorious King of kings,
Deigns to call me His beloved,
Lets me rest beneath His wings.*

—**Mary D. James**

Week 25—Admire Christ's Perfect Sacrifice

(Revelation 5)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you admire the perfect sacrifice of Christ!



SUNDAY: Admiring Christ at the Throne of Judgment

... *“Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”* (Revelation 5:13, emphasis added).

As we look into the final book of the Bible again, remember that it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. The entire Bible is now combined into one majestic picture of Jesus as the Lamb of God. He whom the prophets foretold, the priest portrayed, and to whom John the Baptist pointed, the One who stood unknown in the midst of men, is now shown to be the center of God's plan for the last segment of time prior to when time shall be no more. And at the very center of the universe is His throne—a place of eternal calm, unceasing tranquility, perfect peace, and endless day—like the calm in the eye of a storm.

I had never experienced the calm in the eye of a storm until a hurricane swept through New England in 1989. Hour after hour, the winds increased until mature trees were snapping like little twigs. Then it happened: there was a perfect pool of quiet calm in between the storm's two-pronged devastation. And that is where we are in Revelation 4 and 5—a place of tranquility in between the stormy church age and the tempestuous end of the earth as we know it.

- **Revelation 1–3 reveals His struggling churches.** As Jesus looks at these saints with His laser-like eyes, He takes their pulse, and then warns: “I am only finding some of your lives pleasing in My sight. Repent and come back. Do what I commanded you to do at first.”
- **Revelation 4 reveals the calm between the two storms.** People who perpetually experience the presence of God can live in the eye of the storm continually, having

calmness in the midst of the struggle all around them. Perfect peace always exists in God's presence.

- **Revelation 5–20 reveals the end of the earth.** To fully understand what is going on in these chapters, this week we will admire the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, and remember what He did for us.

In Revelation 5, John transports us from Patmos' prison colony mines to the highest point of heaven to let us gaze at a moment yet future. We are at the throne of judgment, and on the throne is the judge of all, who is getting ready to take back the control of this earth that is reeling out of control toward destruction.

Chapter 5 is written in two distinct parts: verses 1–5 declare the utter unworthiness of mankind in the sight of God; verses 6–14 magnify the utter worthiness of the Lamb. This beautiful old hymn well contrasts both parts.

“Man of Sorrows,” What a Name!

*“Man of sorrows!” what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we,
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! Can it be?
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*Lifted up was He to die,
“It is finished,” was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high,
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

*When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing,
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

—**Philip P. Bliss**

Can you honestly sing “Hallelujah, what a Savior!” to Jesus Christ? This is what admiring the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ is about—acknowledging the greatness of what He accomplished at Calvary. You can find peace at the judgment of God by recognizing your unworthiness and guilt before His holy throne, bowing and worshiping the utter worthiness of the Lamb, who is your perfect substitute!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Thank You, oh Father in heaven, for the all-together perfect sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, the worthy Lamb. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for being the next of kin to us, our kinsman Redeemer. Thank You for taking upon yourself the form of a servant in the likeness of human flesh. Thank You for humbling yourself and becoming obedient, even to the point of taking our frailty and our weakness and clothing yourself in the veil of Your fallen creatures. Thank You that You are not only next of kin but You were willing and able to redeem us. You wanted to redeem us; You loved us so much that you came to die, and You gave Your blood, Your life. You became sin for us. We admire the perfections of Your sacrifice. We want to admire them through worshiping You. I pray that in a very real sense You would meet with us today, speaking to us through Your Word. Open our hearts to the wonder of Your perfect sacrifice. As we track through these verses of Your blessed Word this week, You have promised that we would be blessed for reading it, hearing it, and that You would open our understanding. As we understand Your Word, may we in the greatest sense of our lives admire Christ's perfect sacrifice. We thank You, worthy Lamb of God, Lord Jesus, Root of David! In Your precious name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Utter Unworthiness of Mankind

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it (Revelation 5:1–3, emphasis added).

If you were living in the first century, a scroll with “seven seals” had special meaning. In New Testament times, to protect a will from tampering, Roman law required that it had to be sealed seven times. As it was rolled up, the will was sealed every turn or so, for seven times. The seals were not to be broken until after the person who made the will had died. “Seven,” the number in Scripture that speaks of “spiritual perfection or completion,” reminds us that Revelation 5 represents the perfect time of completion for the scroll to be opened.

These scriptures describe the official document that declares the climax of human history.

- **God has prewritten the future:** *“... The former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them”* (Isaiah 42:9).
- **Ezekiel saw the same scroll:** *Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe* (Ezekiel 2:9–10).
- **Daniel did not understand:** *Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?” And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end”* (Daniel 12:8–9).

The scroll before God’s throne represents Christ’s title deed to all that the Father promised Jesus because of His sacrifice on the cross: *“Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession”* (Psalm 2:8).

The title deed belongs to the Heir, the only One who has the right to take back the earth: *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things ...* (Hebrews 1:1–2).

No person is worthy to open the scroll: *So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it* (Revelation 5:4). All humanity falls short of God’s glory. No one is worthy among all the pharaohs, Caesars, khans, generals, dictators, and emperors. They, and all their subjects, fail to measure up to God’s standard. All have died and have turned to dust.

No one on this sin-cursed earth has ever been born sinless except for One who did not have an earthly father. He was virgin born, and that is why the virgin birth of Christ is so important. Adam’s entire race is fallen. We are sinners by birth and by choice, so God declares every one of us to be sinners except for one—Jesus Christ. No one is good enough to stand beside Jesus and to undo the scroll, for *“There is none righteous, no, not one”* (Romans 3:10).

Our redemption depends totally on Jesus. For Acts 4:12 says: *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Upon whom are you depending?

TUESDAY: The Utter Worthiness of Christ

*But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, **the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed** to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals”* (Revelation 5:5, emphasis added).

Revelation 5:5 contains two truths: (1) The identification of Jesus is perfect; He triumphed over sin, death, and the devil; and (2) the location of Jesus is perfect; He is perfectly positioned. We will discuss the first truth today, and then cover the second in tomorrow's devotional.

“The Lion of Judah” identifies Jesus perfectly. As Jacob was speaking his last words, he prophesied the result of his son's choices: *“Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people”* (Genesis 49:9–10, emphasis added).

“The Root of David” identifies Jesus perfectly. (See Isaiah 11:1–10 and 61:1.) Christ is called the Son of David, but He is also the source of David because He existed before David. Consider this exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees: *While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “The Son of David.” He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?” If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore* (Matthew 22:41–46).

The scribes and Pharisees could not understand what Jesus told them because they did not understand God. Christ is the promised Shiloh, the Root from which David derived his authority, and the son of David from which He got the legal kingly descent to rule over the Jews. And this same Son of David *“has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals”* (5:5).

How did Jesus prevail? He is our beloved kinsman Redeemer in the book of Ruth because He was willing to give His life to set us free from bondage and to restore our lost inheritance. The book of Ruth is one of the most powerful presentations of Jesus Christ as our perfect kinsman Redeemer.

Only Jesus as the *heir of all things* (Hebrews 1:2) meets all the qualifications to become our kinsman Redeemer (see Leviticus 25:23–46): *“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold”* (Leviticus 25:25).

The Old Testament is a huge wealth of background information for understanding the New Testament. The Bible of the apostles and the Lord Jesus Christ was the Old Testament. Jesus showed Himself to His disciples in the Old Testament. In Acts 28, Paul was in prison in Rome, but he spent two years convincing people from the Old Testament of the deity of Christ. Can you do that? The kinsman redeemer is someone who takes a helpless, hopeless person and brings them under His wing.

Here is Christ in the book of Ruth: Boaz said to Ruth, *“The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” ... Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he [Boaz] of the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!” And Naomi said to her, “This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives”* (Ruth 2:12, 20).

Do you remember the story of Ruth? Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, went to Moab because of famine in Judah. Their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married Ruth and Orpah, who were Moabite women. After Naomi's sons and husband died, she returned to Judah with her daughter-in-law, Ruth. They were widows who had no one to take care of them, so they went to look for their kinsman redeemer. The first of kin was not willing and able, so he turned over his right to Boaz. Boaz married Ruth, and they became the great-great-grandparents of King David.

Ruth 4:4–6 tells us that a kinsman redeemer had to be three things: (1) closely related to the one in need; (2) willing and able to take the responsibility to redeem; and (3) able to pay the price of redemption.

You and I are like Ruth and Naomi; we are helpless and hopeless. We have lost our inheritance and are living in bondage. Therefore, we need a kinsman Redeemer who is next of kin to us and is able to pay the price of redemption. Jesus became one of us by taking on human flesh, so He is our **close kinsman Redeemer**. Jesus loved us and was willing to lay down His life for us, so He is our **willing Redeemer**. And Jesus paid the price of our sin with His own body and blood, so He is our **abundantly able Redeemer** who ... *is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him* (Hebrews 7:25).

In this manner Jesus Christ prevailed. Thus, when He walked up to the throne of judgment, it could rightfully be said of Him: "... *the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals*" (Revelation 5:5).

As kinsman Redeemer, Jesus is utterly worthy of praise because He bought all our liabilities and all our sins to the end of our lives! Hallelujah, what a Savior!

WEDNESDAY: Jesus—The Right Person in the Right Place

But He ... has an unchangeable priesthood. ... He is ... able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:24–25, emphasis added).

Jesus is in heaven as our mediator. God the Son, who has been given "*all authority*" (Matthew 28:18), stands before the throne of God as omnipotent.

The location of Jesus is perfect—He is perfectly positioned: ... *in the midst of the throne* [Jesus is located in heaven] *and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth* (Revelation 5:6).

In verse 6, *the seven Spirits of God* does not teach that there are seven Holy Spirits. Rather, there is one sevenfold Spirit, described in Isaiah 11:2 as: (1) the Spirit of the Lord; (2) the Spirit of wisdom; (3) the Spirit of understanding; (4) the Spirit of counsel; (5) the Spirit of strength; (6) the Spirit of knowledge; and (7) the Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

The description of the Lamb, if produced literally by an artist, would provide a grotesque picture, but when understood symbolically, it conveys spiritual truth. Since seven is the number

of perfection, Jesus is **omnipotent**—He has **perfect power** (seven horns); Jesus is **omniscient**—He has **perfect wisdom** (seven eyes); and Jesus is **omnipresent**—He is **perfectly present** (seven Spirits in all the earth).

Jesus is standing in the right place, as the right person, and is identified to be the Lamb of God. He is not a great angel, or Satan's brother, as the Mormons teach. He is not merely a great created being, as Jehovah's Witnesses claim. Nor is He simply a noble man, as the liberals would have us believe. Neither is He just a great prophet, as Muslims propose. Christ Jesus has all the attributes of Deity: He is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Son of God!

In Revelation 5:6–8, Jesus was promised as the perfect Lamb. He is called a Lamb (like a little pet lamb in contrast to a big sheep) no less than twenty-eight times in Revelation. A ram was substituted for Isaac (Genesis 22:8, 13), which is a picture of Christ giving His life for the individual (see Galatians 2:20). At Passover, the lamb was slain for each family (Exodus 12:3). Isaiah states that Jesus died for the nation of Israel (Isaiah 53:8; see also John 11:49–52).

John affirms that the Lamb died for the whole world (John 1:29). Peter said, *You were not redeemed with corruptible things, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot* (1 Peter 1:18–19). The more you meditate on the power and scope of Christ's work on the cross, the more humbled and worshipful you should become.

The action of Jesus is perfect. In Revelation 5:7, Jesus takes the title deed as the exalted Lord of glory: *Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.* Jesus stepped up to take the scroll, for He had paid the price as the perfect kinsman Redeemer, the heir of all things.

The reception of Jesus is perfect. In Revelation 5:8, Jesus hears and keeps all our prayers: *Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

I love that verse—especially for those of us who are declining in health. Prayers are vital to God, and those of you who have extra time due to health problems can have a dynamic ministry of prayer! God loves to answer prayer, and He blesses churches whose people pray for all aspects of their ministry, and seek to glorify Him in everything. What a perfect love gift you can offer Him in behalf of others!

THURSDAY: The Elements of Christ's Perfection

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9, emphasis added).

In Revelation 5:9, a glorious new song about the plan of Jesus is sung: *"You are worthy to take the scroll [worship of Jesus], and to open its seals [authority of Jesus]; for You were slain [substitutionary death of Jesus], and have redeemed us to God by Your blood [redemption of Jesus], out*

of every tribe and tongue and people and nation [gospel of Jesus], and have made us kings and priests to our God [ministry for Jesus]; and we shall reign on the earth [hope in Jesus]."

In that song we can also see the elements of good Christian music. To truly honor Christ, we must be careful to check the content of what we sing or listen to because there are many new "crossover" songs in modern music that only talk about the Lord but never name Him. We should avoid songs that don't name the name that is above every name—the name of the Lord Jesus Christ! Christ-honoring music will include some or all of the following: worship of Jesus, the authority of Jesus, the substitutionary death of Jesus, the redemption of Jesus, the gospel of Jesus, ministry for Jesus, and the sharing of hope in Jesus.

In Revelation 5:11–12 the perfect sacrifice of Jesus is received. All heaven then breaks forth in celebration of His perfect character: *... 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, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive **power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!**"* (emphasis added).

"To receive power!" Jesus came the first time as a weak and helpless baby, and Herod tried to murder Him. But when Jesus comes the second time, He will come as the omnipotent almighty God of the universe!

The Seven Elements of Christ's Perfections:

1. **Power**—Jesus has all power in heaven and in earth.
2. **Riches**—Jesus, who owns all things, became poor for us. He laid aside all the treasures of heaven to walk on this earth as an itinerant prophet who was supported by gifts, but now He holds the ownership of the entire universe.
3. **Wisdom**—Jesus is the source of true wisdom. He was mocked, scoffed at, derided, and accused of everything evil that His enemies could think of, but now He stands as the wisdom of God.
4. **Strength**—Jesus is the mighty Lion of Judah. He was weary, thirsty, and tired at His first coming, but now He is the Rock, the fountain of the Water of Life, and the source of the power of an indestructible life.
5. **Honor**—Jesus shall be honored and every knee shall bow. At His first coming, He did not have a place to lay His head, but now countless myriads of eternal beings focus their adoration and worship on Him. Countless saints raise their voices in song, and the universe glistens and radiates with His glory.
6. **Glory**—Jesus is the highest of heaven adored. He showed His glory briefly on the Mount of Transfiguration, but now He shines as the brightness of the sun in its

strength. All glory and honor is His! Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord of *all*!

7. Blessing—He is the One who produces real and eternal joy.

As you reflect upon the seven elements of Christ's perfections, I encourage you to quietly offer a song of worship to this precious Lamb of God!

FRIDAY: The Lamb Who Overcomes

... *"Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for **the accuser of our brethren ... has been cast down**. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death"* (Revelation 12:10-11, emphasis added).

Now that we have seen Christ as the perfect sacrifice, consider these other wonderful references to the Lamb of God:

- **Jesus is the wrathful Lamb:** ... [They] *said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"* (Revelation 6:16).
- **Jesus is the worshiped Lamb:** *"The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (Revelation 7:17).
- **Jesus is the warring Lamb:** *"These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful"* (Revelation 17:14).
- Jesus—God with us—rejoices at the wedding of the Lamb: *Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God"* (Revelation 19:9).

Do you admire the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Do you admire the worthy Lamb that was slain? From your heart and lips, do you attribute to Him power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing? Like the blind Fanny Crosby, is this song your heartfelt prayer?

Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross

*Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain,
Free to all, a healing stream,
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.*

*Near the cross, a trembling soul,
Love and mercy found me;
There the Bright and Morning Star
Shed His beams around me.*

*Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
Bring its scenes before me;
Help me walk from day to day
With its shadow o'er me.*

*Near the cross! I'll watch and wait,
Hoping, trusting ever,
Till I reach the golden strand,
Just beyond the river.*

*In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever,
Till my ransomed soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.*

—Fanny Crosby, 1820-1915

SATURDAY: Our Triumphant Lamb of Glory

*“Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have **the keys of Hades and of Death**”*
(Revelation 1:17–18, emphasis added).

Let's now see the Lamb of God in five stations as He brings to completion God's plan of the ages. When you worship, worship this wonderful Lamb of Revelation!

1. **The Lamb walks in the midst of His church** (Revelation 1:11–18). He reveals Himself in these wonderful ways: the Lamb is royal in splendor (1:13); the Lamb is purity and ancient wisdom (1:14); the Lamb is revealed with His power displayed (1:15–16); and the Lamb is revealed with His purpose defined (1:18).

2. **The Lamb waits at the door** (Revelation 3:14–22). Jesus is calling to us: “... *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*” (3:20). Remember: Jesus is standing outside the door, knocking. However, He will not come in without being invited. If we open that door, He promises to dine lingeringly with us, which speaks of a time of sweet communion with Him.
3. **The Lamb is worthy of praise** (Revelation 4:11–5:14). “*You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created*” (4: 11). His position in the throne room of heaven is that of Creator; all that was done is for His pleasure. He was slain for man’s sin, and is the heir to the universe. Because of this we see the rights He receives in Revelation 5:11–12: power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing. This Lion of Judah is mighty, and He shall be honored; every knee shall bow and give Him glory, for He is the highest of heaven adored. And finally there is blessing—He is that which produces real and eternal joy. What is the response of all the universe in Revelation 5:13–14? The same as what ours should be; all creatures praise Him, and the whole universe and *the four beasts* worship Him.
4. **The Lamb wars against sinful men** (Revelation 19:11–20:15). In this scene we worship our Lamb of glory as we see Him triumphing during the Tribulation war. As commander of the armies of heaven, He appears for battle with clothing that is of vestures dipped in blood. He is called the Word of God, and conquers the kings of the earth and chains Satan. In Revelation 20:7–15, we see Him again as He finishes up the final postmillennial war. The key events are: Satan is loosed; the millennial last generation follows his deceptions; they are destroyed, face judgment, then go into eternity without Christ!
5. **The Lamb triumphantly welcomes the redeemed** (Revelation 22:1–21). This final glimpse of Jesus as the Lamb starts at God’s throne as the source of the Water of Life, and ends at the seat of the Father and Lamb. Jesus, our Lamb, is the One who offers the tree by the river that brings healing. He declares the eternal triumph, and that there will be no more curse; His servants will now be free to offer unhindered service to Him. Revelation ends with the testimony that He is the Light who was revealed to those who keep His sayings. And because He is a great Savior, His last offer is one of mercy and compassion: *Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (v. 17).

Make a choice to live in hope. This same Lamb of God walks in the midst of His churches today. He is waiting and watching to see if we are willing to open the door to Him that He may

commune with us. All must, and shall, bow before Him in praise of His name above every name. And soon, He, the Lord of glory—the pet Lamb slain for the sin of the whole world—shall welcome each and every redeemed one to dwell with Him forever. Have you found the living hope that can be yours as you admire Christ’s perfect sacrifice at the cross?

Perhaps you can identify with Robert Wolgemuth’s story about a couple’s retreat years ago in which one of the speakers revealed how he had a life-changing meeting at Christ’s cross.

Just a few years out of seminary, John was preparing to lead his small congregation in a special Good Friday worship service. He had prepared a short sermon that he truly hoped would stir them. All alone in a small room, the young priest was getting ready. ... He slipped into robes, zipping and hooking them securely. He pulled the colorful stole over his head and adjusted it perfectly. A full-length mirror stood in the corner of the room. Father Powell couldn’t help himself. He turned and stood facing the glass, filled with a kind of pious presumption he had never felt before. Not like this. ...

Through the door, John could hear the organ starting the prelude. ... He slowly began to move toward it when something caught his eye. Right above the door was a crucifix—Jesus Christ, hanging on the cross. Unlike the handsome priest’s, the Savior’s vestments were nothing more than a loincloth. His stole was His nakedness. A crown of thorns was pressed into the flesh of His head. The only color on the image was from His precious blood. Nothing could have looked more pathetic.

The priest hesitated. ... In a moment his shock turned to embarrassment, then abject shame. He fell to his knees. “What am I doing here?” the priest cried aloud, burying his face in his hands. “Oh, please forgive me, my Holy Father,” he wept. “I am not worthy even to kneel in Your holy presence. How could I dare to stand ... or to speak?” ... A simple glimpse of the cross had not only prepared John for this moment, but had seared a permanent image in his mind of the Crucified One.

It was at this moment that Father John Powell was truly ready to worship.²

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen.*

—Isaac Watts

Week 26—Understand Christ's Wrath

(Revelation 6)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you learn to understand Christ's wrath!



SUNDAY: The Inexplicable Mystery

[He] ... *is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to **the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began*** (Romans 16:25, emphasis added).

Revelation 6 opens with the period that is known in the Bible as the Great Tribulation. To some, hearing talk about the impending arrival of Tribulation, such as this world has never known, may seem like just another science fiction story, or simply the delusion of alarmist Christians. Thus, scoffers often mockingly ask: “*Where is the promise of His coming? For ... all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation*” (2 Peter 3:4).

Why God delays in reclaiming the kingdom for Himself is an inexplicable mystery—the mystery of the presence of evil. For thousands of years, God has allowed Satan to wrap his vicious, slimy, filthy, cruel tentacles around human life and around this earth.

There is no village or town without its seething, and there is no human heart without its insidious darkness. There is no life without its tears and its sorrows. There is no home that ultimately does not get broken by death; there is no family that does not see the circle of the home dissolved by the depths of the grave. The pages of history, from the time of the first murder until this present hour, are written in blood, tears, and death.

Does God know all this? Is He indifferent to it? Is He not able to overcome it? The mystery of how and why God allows sin and suffering to run its deadly course through human history has been one of the most persistent questions that skeptical unbelievers have asked Christians. The infidel,

the atheist, the agnostic, and the unbeliever laugh and mock us, and God allows them to laugh and mock.

God seemingly just looks on as our missionaries are slain, our churches are burned to the ground, and countless millions upon millions of people on this earth are oppressed and living in despair. He apparently does not intervene—nor does He say anything, and neither does He move. Sin just develops. It goes on and on. Oh, the mystery of the delay of the Lord God!

But somewhere beyond the starry sky there stands a herald angel with a trumpet in his hand, and by the decree of the Lord God Almighty, there is a day, there is an hour, there is a moment, there is an elected time when the angel shall sound the trumpet and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ!¹ When that trumpet sounds and God intervenes, the entire world will take note of it, and the mystery of God's delay shall be no more. But until then, you and I can find hope in knowing that some day God *will* right all wrongs! For He is the eternal King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, the question You inspired John to write in his rocky exile on Patmos 2,000 years ago is a great one for each of us to ponder: Who is able to stand before Your wrath—the wrath of Jesus, the Creator, the Judge—if You are not our Redeemer? I pray that this will be a sobering thought for any who are not spiritually prepared to stand before Your wrath, oh Christ, the Lamb. In the privacy of their wills, may they realize that You wrote a love letter in blood on a cross of wood; there You gave Your life for our sins, and shed Your own blood to cleanse us. May they, without delay, realize their need of a Savior. As for Your children, may we all realize what You want us to do during the closing hours as this world heads toward a ghastly ending. May we dispense Your antidote with our lips, speaking Your wonderful Words of life! May we not hesitate to do so because people are headed toward the horrors of the pit. I pray that You would touch each Christian's heart, oh Lord, to be Your good and faithful servant. May Your Word be magnified in every life! I pray this all in Your lovely name, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Horrors of Christ's Wrath

"... He will ... say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels ...'" (Matthew 25:41, emphasis added).

Let us now look at that future moment when the trumpet sounds and the Lord opens the Tribulation to begin reclaiming His rights to the earth. One by one Christ will unroll the seals of Revelation 6. As each seal is broken, He will take further possession and control of His inheritance. Listed below are excerpts from the opening of each seal:

- **First Seal (vv. 1–2)—The Conqueror:** ... *A crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer* (v. 2b).
- **Second Seal (vv. 3–4)—Conflict on Earth:** ... *It was granted ... to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword* (v. 4b).
- **Third Seal (vv. 5–6)—Scarcity on Earth:** ... *He who sat on [the black horse] had a pair of scales in his hand. ... “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine”* (vv. 5b, 6b).
- **Fourth Seal (vv. 7–8)—Widespread Death on Earth:** ... *The name of him who sat on [the pale horse] was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth* (v. 8).
- **Fifth Seal (vv. 9–11)—The Cry of the Martyrs:** *“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” ... And it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed* (v. 10b, 11b).
- **Sixth Seal (vv. 12–17)—Cosmic Disturbances:** ... *There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, ... Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place* (vv. 12–14).

Finally, in Revelation 11:15, when Jesus Christ unrolls the **seventh seal** and the seventh trumpet blows, it will be complete—He will have taken back the rule of His planet: *The seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”*

During this terrible time of tribulation, one out of four people will die (6:8)—some through the ravages of war, others by starvation, and many others by the *beasts of the earth*. Death may come instantly, without prolonged dread, or it may come slowly and painfully. In 2006, the world's population was 6,491,353,180; that means that at least 1,622,838,295, or more than five times the current population of the United States, will die. Can you imagine that? Because the population of the world doubles every thirty-nine and one-half years, the number of people who will die grows larger every day.

In addition, one-third of all vegetation will be burned up. All grass, every tree, and everything else that is green will be destroyed (8:7). The sun and the moon will be darkened as nature goes into revolt (8:12). The gates of hell will open and hordes of locusts shaped *“like horses prepared*

for battle will come upon the earth. Those locusts will be permitted to sting men like scorpions, and the pain will last for five months. The Bible says that men will beg God to let them die, but they will not die (9:6).

During the dreaded Battle of Armageddon (14:20), the blood of those killed in battle will flow for 200 miles, and reach up to the bridle of a horse (about four feet) in the valley of Jezreel. And there will be worldwide famine unlike anything the world has ever seen (18:8).

What has just been described in the last three paragraphs represents only some of the highlights that describe the living hell you will avoid if you are part of the Rapture!

But *before* mankind is destroyed by nations or his own hand, *the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words* (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18).

Do you have the hope of being caught up in the clouds to meet our blessed Lord in the air? Has Christ's forgiveness been applied to your life? If not, it can be today. God still stands with open arms saying: *"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other"* (Isaiah 45:22).

Altogether, as many as half the people on earth will be killed during the Great Tribulation. Because the events to come will be so horrible, God has promised that His born-again ones will be taken home to be with Him before His wrath falls upon this planet. Do you now see why God refers to the Rapture as a *blessed hope*? If He were to come today, would you be part of that glorious home going?

TUESDAY: The Chilling Words of God's Warning

Of how much worse punishment ... will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:29, emphasis added).

Yesterday we saw highlights of some of the dreadful disasters that will occur during the Great Tribulation. We see that same ominous message in Matthew and Mark. Note how Jesus describes the powerful effect of the coming pestilences: *"... Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened"* (Matthew 24:22; see also Mark 13:20).

Listen to Jesus again as He foretold that one of the signs of His Second Coming would be the onslaught of global pestilences: *"... There will be ... famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven"* (Luke 21:11).

There have always been diseases, plagues, and pestilences, but none have been capable of spreading worldwide until the advent of global travel. Until the invention of the steam engine in the nineteenth century, most plague carriers would die before they traveled very far. But begin-

ning with air travel in the twentieth century, it became possible to harbor a plague or pestilence, board a flight, and reach a distant destination before ever exhibiting symptoms. By the time the disease was discovered, everyone who had come in contact with that person would have already been exposed to the plague, and perhaps have become carriers themselves.

Consider the magnitude of possibilities, like this report in the February 2005 edition of *New Yorker Magazine*:

The vicious avian flu that has killed dozens of people in Vietnam, Thailand, and elsewhere in the region has caused the deaths of hundreds of millions of animals in nearly a dozen Asian countries in the past two years and could kill millions of people if it becomes capable of spreading efficiently among humans. No such virus has ever spread so quickly over such a wide geographical area, and, unlike most viruses, this one has already affected a more diverse group than any other type of flu, and it has killed many animals previously thought to be resistant.

One farmer whose chickens were killed by the virus says, "It's so hard to watch. One day, they're all alive and healthy—the vets were here the week before to check them—and the next day they're dying by the thousand. It happened so quickly. They started shivering, thousands of them at once. And then they started to fall. Every one of them. They just fell over, dead."

Scott Dowell, the director of the Centers for Disease Control's Thailand office, told Specter, "The world just has no idea what it's going to see if this thing comes. When, really. It's when. I don't think we can afford the luxury of the word 'if' anymore. ... The clock is ticking. We just don't know what time it is."

Robert Webster, a virologist at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, in Memphis, who has been studying avian influenza for decades, was even more stark: "**This is the worst flu virus** I have ever seen or worked with or read about. We have to prepare as if we were going to war—and the public needs to understand that clearly. This virus is playing its role as a natural bioterrorist. ... If it does happen, and I fully expect that it will, **there will be no place for any of us to hide**. Not in the United States or in Europe or in a bunker somewhere. The virus is a very promiscuous and effective killer." (emphasis added.)²

Not all politicians have ignored the threat. When Tommy Thompson, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, announced his resignation, he cited an avian-influenza epidemic as one of the greatest dangers the United States faces. The World Health Organization's conservative estimate of the number of deaths that an epidemic would cause is seven million worldwide. Because people transmit flu before they even have symptoms themselves, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to halt the spread of the avian flu virus. And now, even a year later, scientists around the world are continuing to warn us about the dangers of avian flu.

Amazingly, instead of talking about what MAY happen, current news reports are now talking about what IS happening. Consider those reports, and others you've heard, in light of the full-blown Tribulation scene in Revelation 6.

Understanding Christ's wrath is exciting because its appearance means that our redemption is drawing near, and He will be reclaiming the earth that is rightfully His. Yet it is also chilling because of what it means to earth's inhabitants—including our unsaved family members, friends, and neighbors. God's people must therefore mobilize and urgently warn as many as possible!

WEDNESDAY: Inescapable Death

*It is **appointed for men to die once**, but after this the judgment* (Hebrews 9:27, emphasis added).

In yesterday's lesson we saw that there will be nowhere to hide from worldwide pestilences like the avian flu. In a matter of a few weeks, death for millions upon millions would be inescapable. As described in God's inspired Word, that scenario certainly fits with when the Lord is reeling in this rebellious planet at the end of human history: *I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth* (Revelation 6:8).

The rider on the pale horse begins his deadly ride at some point during the Tribulation, and before his ride is over, a quarter of the population of mankind will be dead from either war, famine, or *the beasts of the earth*. The word "beasts" in verse 8 is *therion* in Greek, and means a "venomous beast." The H5N1 avian flu is a viral infection that scientists fear has crossed over from the beasts of the earth to human-to-human transmission. A virus is, in and of itself, a living thing, a "venomous beast" by definition.

The existence of a deadly virus, combined with the other signs of the soon return of the Lord, suggests a loose time frame for the end of human history. For 2,000 years, that time frame was "someday" or "eventually." For our generation, however, the ability to kill a quarter of mankind with war, famine, and infectious disease is imminently real. As Dr. Michael Specter observed: "If not this year or the next, the following year, depending on the 'if-then' factor ...

IF Iran doesn't use its nuclear weapons,

IF the Pakistanis and Indians don't nuke each other,

IF North Korea doesn't use its atomic bombs,

IF a vaccine is discovered for H5N1,

IF terrorists don't get their hands on bio-weapons,

IF no global war arises out of our newly articulated policy of spreading democracy into the Third World, and

IF the ongoing Middle East conflicts don't spark a global thermonuclear war first, THEN, maybe it might take a little longer.”³

While we wait, we have been gifted, called, and empowered to be His witnesses.

- **The Motivation:** *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). Our marching orders as believers came in Galilee as Jesus invited His disciples to their commissioning (see Matthew 28:16–20). We are all to be involved in making disciples. We are to LOVE the lost by going to the lost.
- **The Power:** *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:44). We are to PRAY for the lost.
- **The Method:** *Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily* (Colossians 1:28–29). We are to WARN the lost.
- **The Urgency:** *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ...* (2 Corinthians 5:11). We are to PERSUADE the lost.

Are you loving, warning, persuading, and praying for the lost? Make whatever time you have left on earth count for Christ—for eternity!

THURSDAY: A Tour of the Grave

*“There **was** a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there **was** a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate ...”* (Luke 16:19–20, emphasis added).

Today we will be taking a tour of the grave—the destination of the vast majority of people whom you live with, work with, and see around you in daily life: “You and I, everybody you meet, from the mailman to the guy next to you at work, has an eternal destiny. That destiny is either a joyful existence in the presence of God, or a Christ-less eternity in the place prepared

for the devil and his angels. It is a real place.”⁴ What I am about to share may change the whole way you look at death, dying, the grave, and the afterlife. The expert witness, the only One who has ever gone to the grave and returned to report on it, is Jesus. No one has greater reliability or more to say on the afterlife than He. As Revelation 1 says, Jesus Christ alone has the keys to death and to the grave.

In Luke 12:16–20, Jesus told a parable of the rich man who mastered the “eat, drink, and be merry” lifestyle. He was so filled with greedy plans for the future that God said to him, *“Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?”* (Luke 12:20).

Now consider what Jesus reports concerning Lazarus and the rich man. It is seen in the very important word “was” in Luke 16:19–20: *“There **was** a certain rich man ...”* (emphasis added). Unlike Luke 12:16–20, Jesus did not use the word “parable” because He was speaking of a literal event of which He, as God, had knowledge. Jesus continued by saying: *“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame’”* (Luke 16:22–24).

Jesus explains another truth in that passage. Before their pardon was secured at the cross of Calvary, the righteous dead (like Abraham, Moses, and so forth) did NOT go directly to heaven as do blood-bought Christians of the church age. Instead, they went to paradise. The grave (Sheol, Hades) was at that time divided into two parts: *“Abraham’s bosom”* was a place of comfort; the other was a place of torment. But both were located physically in the grave, or hell, as it is called in many places.

Note that the rich man could actually see Lazarus, which indicates a literal existence and therefore a literal torment and a literal flame. Abraham explained the division of hell to the rich man, including the fact that Lazarus could not come to him. Now look at the account again as the rich man cried out: *“... ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment’”* (Luke 16:27–28).

The rich man remembered his life on earth, as he will for eternity. Thus he remembered his loved ones, and was conscious of their destiny. So he pleaded with Abraham to do something, but Abraham simply told him: *“‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’”* (Luke 16:29–31).

Here is something extremely revealing about their conversation: Abraham is Abraham, and Lazarus, the beggar, is Lazarus; but the rich man had no name. He had his memories; he had awareness of his surroundings; he knew the hopelessness of the situation. The only thing he wanted more than a drink of water was to save his five brothers. But *he has no name*. Why is

that so important? Because he does not need one; nobody will ever speak it again. There will be no reprieve, no visitors, no hope, and no need for a name. To all intents and purposes, he is dead, and will be eternally aware of that fact. Eternal, conscious, perpetual, lonely torment—dead forever, yet alive—always remembering the opportunities God had given him to escape such torment!

That is what awaits the mail deliverer, the guy or gal next to you, or friends and relatives of whom you say, “I’ll talk to him (or her) when the time is right.” Or, when he or she says to you: “I’ll think about it. Maybe tomorrow ...” But at any moment God could unexpectedly say, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you!”

FRIDAY: The Full-Blown Consequence Engine

... Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:7–9, emphasis added).

God always rewards good and eventually punishes all evil. No detail, no matter how minute, escapes His attention. But most lost people and many immature believers speculate that God, because He is good, grants some type of general amnesty to people by adding up the good deeds and subtracting the bad. And then, they suppose, He throws in some extra mercy here and there so that just about everybody can make it to heaven one way or another.

In a magazine interview prior to her two-hour special called *Heaven*, which aired on ABC in December 2005, newscaster Barbara Walters reported: “Most of us, regardless of our religious persuasion, do not think that life on earth ends here. We do not believe that this is all there is. There are some 10,000 religions in the world, and nearly all incorporate teachings of an after-life. In America, nine out of ten people believe that heaven is a real place—and most have faith that they are going there at the end of their lives.”⁵

Nothing could be further from Christ’s Word in the Bible. Every human choice and action has consequences, whether good or ill. We are all affected by the choices others make as well. This reality of consequences, and God’s laws that govern the physical and spiritual universe, I like to call “The Consequence Engine.” The concept of the consequence engine is captured in Galatians 6:7–9.

The negative consequence engine operates for everyone in daily life. For example, driving over the speed limit can get us a speeding ticket, and driving under the influence can have more severe consequences. Not paying the rent usually causes a renter to lose his residence. Not showing up for work on time can get one fired. And the slightest disobedience to the Drill Sergeant in military basic training can prove painfully costly.

“Sensible people” who are law-abiding and “moral” cause less trouble for themselves in this life, and are better as long as they live—compared to the person who is irresponsible, promiscuous, or abuses alcohol or drugs, and can’t hold a job.

Neither type of individual may end up in heaven, but this present life is less painful for people who see the intrinsic order in the world and who follow it as best they can, even if their motives are self-serving, and even if they do not know God.

Always remember that God takes note of everything that is going on. Nothing escapes His notice, especially a person’s motives: ... *Judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light ... the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God* (1 Corinthians 4:5 NIV).

Most people are not interested in knowing the real God; they are actually enemies of God. This general animosity toward the real God is the main cause of the invention of earth’s many religions. God gives everyone enough knowledge of His existence and of His attributes so that all men everywhere are without excuse for failing to acknowledge Him (see Romans 1:18–21). When people hear, but reject, the gospel of Jesus Christ, God ordinarily leaves such people alone. They simply live out the rest of their lives, often in relative peace and even prosperity.

The consequence engines of life, inexorable and unavoidable though they may be, do not usually bring immediate consequences in response to our actions. An old Proverb says, “The mills of God’s justice grind exceedingly slow—but they grind exceedingly fine.”

Because we often do not see the negative consequences of our bad choices right away, we may be persuaded to make bigger and more foolish mistakes. Because God’s judgments are usually long delayed in time, many think the Lord never judges anyone at all. But, in the end, they will face not only physical death but also eternal separation from God because they never laid hold of the saving life of Christ.

The record books of life are being kept up daily by recording angels who miss no details. Judgment is totally fair and just, even for the lost. Punishment is appropriately proportional, following the great principle outlined in Romans 2. God weighs the motives of the heart as well as behavior, and He takes into account the individual’s actual knowledge of God.

Nonbelievers do not cease to exist when they die, nor do they pass into limbo or purgatory. After death they end up intact and conscious at the last judgment, which is the full-blown consequence engine in action for what was done in the flesh on earth: ... *I saw the dead ... standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea ... and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works* (Revelation 20:12–13).

For the Christian, however, all sin is forgivable, but all sin *also* has consequences. We will not be judged for our sins, which have been paid in full by Jesus, but, like everyone else, we certainly will be thoroughly evaluated for all our choices in life. We cannot escape this fact: *all choices in life have positive or negative consequences.*

We only have two building materials in life—what will last (positive consequences) and what will not (negative consequences). That is another New Testament description of the consequence engine at work in the believer. What we do (build) will ultimately either endure, or suffer loss (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

What counts most, actions that lead to positive consequences, are the works Jesus does in and through us when we make ourselves available to God. The basic rule of Christian life is this: “Nothing coming from me—everything coming from Christ!”

SATURDAY: Christ Is the Answer

*“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; But you are not willing to **come to Me that you may have life**” (John 5:39–40, emphasis added).*

I can't say this often enough: these are the last days! The Rapture is coming, and the Tribulation is almost upon us. So look up, for the King is coming! But He isn't here yet ... and there are plenty of people alive today who won't be here then, either.

In the ten seconds of time it takes me to say this sentence, eighteen human beings awoke in eternity because they died on earth. Every hour, 6,464 more people die. That amounts to 155,131 per day, or 56 million a year. What should those alarming statistics mean to us? Three things:

1. **Life is fragile.** As the Lord has reminded us in His Word, our lives are but a vapor. We can be healthy, strong, and full of life today; yet, a tiny virus can make us sick tomorrow. The next day we can shiver and the following day we can fall over dead—just like the countless birds dying in Asia today. Life is too fragile to be wasted!
2. **Death is inevitable.** Although a few of us will be privileged to be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at Christ's coming all lost people and most believers have an appointment with death. Death is unstoppable and inescapable. With the weather growing more violent, people becoming more openly wicked, warfare becoming more globally lethal, and pestilences stalking the planet like never before, life is truly fragile and death is inevitable.
3. **Christ is our only answer—our only hope.** Flu shots cannot help our souls. The United Nations is not able to stop the growth of evil. Our only hope is found in God's Word. The only escape pathway is laid out by Him.
 - **God has given us the conclusion to human history—the Bible.** Trust Him completely. Since people are the only investment that lasts eternally, invest heavily in disciple-making.

- **God has given us a job to do while He is away**—soul winning. Therefore, obey Him now. If you have not started to share the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ, start today.
- **God has given us a way to stay in touch with Him**—time spent in the Word. If you haven't started regular devotions yet, begin now to make reading His Word and praying a priority.
- **God has given us a means to start an investment account in heaven**—sacrificial giving. So then, give sacrificially to support His church. Don't waste the money He's entrusted you with, because God has told us that the earth is doomed. Be a good steward by using His money wisely for Him.

Make a choice to live in hope. As we rapidly approach the end of days, you can find living and abiding hope by choosing to please God and make disciples for Christ. How can you start? Ask the Lord to help you apply what you have learned this week by making the words of this song a daily reality in your life:

Rescue the Perishing

*Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, Lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.*

*Down in the human heart, Crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, Wakened by kindness,
Chords that are broken will vibrate once more.*

*Rescue the perishing, Duty demands it;
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way Patiently win them,
Tell the poor wand'rer a Savior has died.*

*Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.*

—**Fanny J. Crosby, 1820-1915**

Week 27—Remember Christ's Love

(Revelation 7)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you remember the wondrous love of Jesus!



SUNDAY: The Love of Jesus

*“For **God so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, emphasis added).*

Who could ever forget the dramatic scene of Revelation 6? Somewhere beyond the starry sky a herald angel stood with a trumpet in his hand, and at an elected time, by the decree of the Lord God Almighty, the trumpet sounded and the kingdoms of this world became the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ! Thus the Tribulation opened, and Christ began taking back the earth, which is rightfully His. One by one Christ will unroll the seals. As each seal is broken, He will gain further possession and control of His inheritance.

Revelation 7 then opens with the love of Jesus sending 144,000 missionaries into this time of Great Tribulation upon the world. This is the most important chapter to help us truly understand the love of Jesus Christ. In no other place in the Bible is it so dramatically etched out as it is in the contrast between the wrath in chapter 6 and the mercy in chapter 7.

Christ's merciful love in Revelation 7 is demonstrated by His sending over four times as many missionaries into the world as are currently serving Him. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are only 35,000 missionaries of every persuasion, but during the Tribulation He will provide 144,000 evangelists!

Look at how Jesus shows His love throughout this overview of Revelation 7:

- **Verses 1–3:** Jesus stands with the servants of the Lamb, and prepares them for the bad times ahead. His Spirit signs, seals, and secures them.

- **Verses 4–8:** Jesus knows where His servants are at all times. He directs His servants, and seals 12,000 members of each of the tribes of Israel.
- **Verses 9–10:** Jesus wants His servants with Him.
- **Verses 11–12, 15:** Jesus seeks His servants' worship.
- **Verses 13–14:** Jesus promises His servants a fruitful ministry.
- **Verse 16:** Jesus comforts His servants after all their troubles on earth.
- **Verse 17:** Jesus refreshes His servants by His presence.

What a beautiful chapter! Like Jesus, do you share His loving passion for lost souls? Do you have a burden for the lost? If you haven't up to this point, would you like to get started? You can begin by making a list of unsaved family members, friends, and neighbors, and then start praying for them. Get a supply of gospel tracts at your local church or Christian bookstore, and ask the Lord to give you divine appointments to share those tracts. Then keep praying, and look expectantly for the Lord's direction. Once you begin giving away tracts and loving lost souls, Christ will grant fruit, and you will share in His joy over each person who turns from darkness to the Light.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord, we thank You for the magnificence of Your love! It is so comforting to see Your love as the Lamb who shepherds, sustains, and meets every need and fulfills every desire of Your faithful servants. Thank You that before You unleash the horrors of the Tribulation on earth, that You put evangelists into every corner of this planet to give the good news of the gospel. Thank You for loving the world so much that You gave Your life to pay our sin debt. Even when You are hated, and those who will have nothing to do with You seek to erase Your servants from the face of this earth, You still mercifully send Your messengers. Oh, how we pray that we will see the beauty of what messengers of the Master in the Tribulation look like so that we can emulate them! If that is what You honor and love, that is what we want to be. We want to rejoice in the security and the knowledge of how You care for those whom You send out to minister. Open our eyes to behold more wonderful things about You, Lord Jesus, for it is in Your precious name that we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: How Jesus Shows His Love

*After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, “**Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads**” (Revelation 7:1–3, emphasis added).*

We now meet the evangelists our loving God sends to rescue helpless sinners at earth's darkest hour. In the company of the Lamb are those who rest in the absolutely secure safety of the love of Jesus for His servants. Jesus shows His love as He stands with these slaves of the Lamb. How does He do that? Look at the elements of Christ's love in Revelation 7:1–3. Notice that Jesus calls for the angels to hold back the four winds lest the judgment should blow across the earth. Before the judgment sweeps down upon the earth, and these servants who are residing there, Jesus prepares them for bad times. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever experienced some great and fruitful times of fellowship with the Lord just before bad times hit?

So many times my wife, Bonnie, and I have talked about the challenging and difficult periods we have gone through in our lives, ministry, and family. During such talks, we remembered with gratefulness how the Lord has often given special seasons when our fellowship with Him through the Word and prayer was elongated because He was lovingly preparing us for the hardships ahead.

These Jewish evangelists are also being lovingly prepared for what is ahead by being *sealed* with the mark on their foreheads of Christ's name and the name of His Father. But the term "sealed" is different from anything we know about. In the ancient world, a mark upon a person could stand for at least five different things. **A mark could stand for:**

1. **Ownership:** Often a slave was branded with his owner's mark, just as sheep and cattle are branded. In this instance, the 144,000 missionaries belong to the Lamb of God.
2. **Loyalty:** A soldier would sometimes brand his hand with the name of the general whom he loved, and would willingly follow him into any battle. In the presence of the Lamb stand the veterans who have proved their loyalty.
3. **Security:** Historically, a wax seal pressed with the imprint of an owner would secure that object as owned and belonging to another. Similarly, God's seal upon these witnesses, as well as upon us (2 Corinthians 1:21–22), shows God's ownership—and the great security that brings!
4. **Dependence:** The great Arab chieftains had some humble clients who were absolutely dependent on them. Often, to outwardly identify that dependence, a sheik would brand his clients with the same mark used to brand his camels. In the company of the Lamb are those who are utterly dependent on His love and the grace of God.
5. **Safety:** "It was common for those who were the devotees of a god to be stamped with his sign. Sometimes that worked very cruelly. Plutarch tells us that after the disastrous defeat of the Athenians under Nicias in Sicily, the Sicilians took the captives and branded them on the forehead with a galloping horse, the emblem

of Sicily.”¹ So these marked ones in chapter 7 are owned, loyal, secure, dependent, and trusting. They are resting safely in the Lord because they have responded to the love of Jesus. Have you made time to experience Christ’s love as you worship Him today?

TUESDAY: The Sealed of Israel

*And I heard the number of those who were sealed. **One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed***” (Revelation 7:4, emphasis added).

In chapter 7, the Lamb’s servants are protected; no harm can come to those who are sealed. Who are these people? They are tribes of Israel, the Jews, not the church or anyone else. Many commentators have tried to show that they are not Jews—especially Reformed scholars who believe that God is through with the Jews forever, and is dealing with the church only. They believe that these special missionaries are either denominations or great triumphant Christians of the past. But what do Judah, Rueben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin have in common? They are all sons of Jacob.

The servants in this passage are born-again Jewish people. Jesus either confronts each of them personally, just like He did the apostle Paul, or perhaps there is a great outpouring of God in Israel at this time. We do not know for sure how they’ve come to Christ, but we do know from the Scriptures that these 144,000 are all converted.

In Ephesians 1, we see that when believers come to Christ they are: chosen, sealed, spiritually filled, spiritually led, protected, rewarded, servants, and owned. And, as Romans 8:16 says, the Spirit assures us that we are saved: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

This is exactly what God does for the 144,000 Jews who become Christians. The Holy Spirit of God seals them, so they likewise get to experience the great Shepherd’s betrothal gift to His bride, which is the Holy Spirit—“the earnest” or “*guarantee of our inheritance*”: *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee [earnest] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory* (Ephesians 1:13–14).

The thought behind the word “guarantee” (NKJV) or “earnest” (KJV) is exactly the thought behind the idea of an engagement ring or down payment on something. Just as a bride-to-be delights in showing off her engagement ring, so we are to delight in “showing off” the Holy Spirit before the world to signify that our affections have been engaged to another: *to Him who was raised from the dead* (Romans 7:4). No longer are we to show any allegiance to the decaying and soon-passing world system. That is why it is spiritual adultery to love the world and all that is in it.

If you are truly engaged to Jesus Christ, this will be evident through special spiritual changes in your life. If you can see no such changes, you would do well to question: *Am I really betrothed to Christ? Is He my beloved?*

WEDNESDAY: The Holy Spirit Signs His Servants

... He who establishes us with you in Christ ... has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:21–22, emphasis added).

God not only seals and secures His servants, but Jesus also shows His love by always knowing the whereabouts of His servants that He has signed His name upon (Revelation 7:4–8). There is something comforting about this in verse 4: *... One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed*

If you really want to confound a Jew, ask him, “What tribe are you in?” He won’t be able to tell you. In A.D. 70, when the Roman General Titus came and burned the temple, genealogical records that were stored there, and zealously guarded, were destroyed. But God knows which tribe each of His people is in, and Jesus always knows where His servants are.

In Revelation 7:5–8, the tribes are not listed in their right birth order. Not all the tribes are there. Dan is missing, Manasseh is the son of Joseph, and Ephraim is not in this listing. The order according to birth would be: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and so on. However, the list as it appears in chapter 7 is God’s order. Judah is shown first because that is the royal tribe. The tribe of Dan is not there because they apostatized, and no apostate can be an evangelist. God has His purposes and He sets things in order as He sees fit. (By the way, this is not the same order listed in Revelation 21 and 22.)

Jesus will identify all the members of these tribes, confront them face-to-face, and draw them to Himself. Some people have a problem with His chasing after the 144,000 like this because of feeling that in their own lives they had to search for Christ a long time before getting saved. Such persons simply have a wrong view of salvation. No one personally seeks the Lord: *“There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God”* (Romans 3:10–11). God is the One who always does the chasing to draw us to Himself. We were born dead in our trespasses and sins—we were not born looking for Jesus.

We can clearly see in the 144,000 that there are three elements to what the Holy Spirit does in each believer at salvation: (1) the Spirit signs us; (2) the Spirit seals us; and (3) the Spirit secures us. (We will cover all three elements over the next few days.)

First Element of Salvation—The Spirit Signs Us: *... He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God ...* (2 Corinthians 1:21). *Anointed* is the signature of God showing that we have security, and authentically belong to God. Many people in Christendom worry a lot about whether or not they are really saved. Usually this is due to having an incorrect view as

to how they became a Christian. They forget *Who* does the action and *Who* is the initiator of salvation. The Bible says that it is always God.

Remember: we don't find *Christ*, He finds *us*. We are lost, and He is the seeker: "*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10). He first finds us, we respond to Him, and then He establishes us. That means He grabs hold of us and anoints us with His Spirit; He signs us so that we are authentically His.

- His gift of salvation is **gracious**: *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name ...* (John 1:12).
- His supply is **inexhaustible**: *For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure* (John 3:34).
- His anointing is **personal**: *But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things* (1 John 2:20).

It is so wonderful that we don't need a mystical anointing from some teacher. The Holy Spirit signs us so that we are authentically God's. Hallelujah!

THURSDAY: The Holy Spirit Seals His Servants

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9–10, emphasis added).

In the verses above Jesus shows His love by wanting His servants with Him. Christ has a global desire to cry out His message. The 144,000 missionaries will go to the entire world and find the greatest response in history to the gospel—a numberless multitude will come to Christ. Because of His merciful love, Jesus wants lost people on earth to be with Him. Think about this: when you and I witness and share the gospel, we are extending Christ's invitation to people whom He wants to live with Him forever. What a privilege!

Why are the white-robed people there in verse 9? The Beast, the Antichrist, killed them. In fact, the Antichrist and his legions followed them around. Can you imagine being a missionary and having someone with an AK-47 standing behind you, ready to kill the people you lead to salvation? It would be hard to evangelize. Maybe that is why there are not more in the Muslim world coming to Christ because few missionaries are willing to go to them and be killed. But these 144,000 evangelists will boldly go forth to evangelize in spite of Antichrist's agents spying on them, and in spite of seeing those who come to Christ being martyred. They will be so

zealous, and God's love in Christ will be so powerful, that as all hell is breaking loose on the planet, countless people will be led to Christ. For they will realize that their true citizenship is in heaven, as Scripture tells us in Hebrews 11:13–16.

Second Element of Salvation—The Spirit Seals His Servants: ... *Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee* (2 Corinthians 1:22a). The ancient world recognized the sealing of goods. People wore signet rings with distinctive markings on them. They would press their signet into soft wax or clay across the opening of a document, tomb, sealed box, and so on; it would bear an exact imprint of that signet ring, which signified that a representation of the owner was going with it.

The Holy Spirit's sealing of us is the believer's security of divine ownership. In other words, we have the image of our owner transferred to us. We bear the image of Christ—our precious possession. As we yield to Him, we will look more and more like Him every day because the Holy Spirit will impress the image of Christ on us.

We can't escape this truth: as we age we will act more like whoever our "god" is. For that reason, it grieves me as a pastor when I see professing Christians who do not look more like Christ every day. Instead, they idolize a current rock star, movie star, or sports figure. Although they may deny it, that person is their "god." Who you admire is who you want to look like. If you admire the Lord Jesus Christ and belong to Him, as you view Him through the picture window of the Bible, you will want to look more like Him every day.

When the Spirit seals us, it assures us of three things:

1. **We are verified**—the image of the owner's signet is transferred to us.
2. **We are signified**—by the presence of the owner. If the owner could not be at a transaction in ancient times, his ring signified that he had been there in spirit at least.
3. **We are certified**—the contents are authentic. We really have God's life and have His image within us!

Who or what do you serve? Is your "god" made in the image of man—or do you serve the authentic Lord God Almighty of the universe? The answer to that question determines your eternal dwelling place.

FRIDAY: The Holy Spirit Secures His Servants

*All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! **Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our***

God forever and ever. Amen.” ... Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them (Revelation 7:11–12, 15, emphasis added).

Jesus shows His love by seeking His servants’ worship. What a great joy it will be for Him to hear this massive outpouring of a sevenfold doxology! How will Christ be worshiped in verses 11 and 12? They will speak to Him. You can speak praises to God, too, and show other people how to prepare for worship. Look again at what He loves to hear: *“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”* If you truly love Christ, tell Him: “Oh God, everything that is important I offer to You—my attention, possessions, and pleasure!”

The Old Testament worshipers used to bring their sacrifices in hands that were lifted up. When we enter the Lord’s house, we should lift up our overflowing hearts of love in worship as a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God. Jesus longs for us to worship Him through His Word, songs, fasting, and prayer. All this focuses our lives on Him, as He desires.

If you want to enhance your worship experience, I encourage you to arrive early at services; sit down, stop your activity and thoughts, and become still before the Lord. Then open your Bible and get tuned in to the Lord (like you tune in your favorite radio station), for Psalm 46:10 says: *Be still, and know that I am God.* We must purposefully open our hearts and let His Word draw us to Him so we can begin to worship Him as He deserves.

Jesus also shows His love by promising His servants a fruitful ministry (Revelation 7:13–14). This is a promise that has been fulfilled. Jesus discussed the Tribulation in the Gospels. In Matthew 10 He spoke to the Jews in particular, and secondarily to us: *“... You will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes”* (vv. 22–23).

In Matthew 10:22–23, Christ is also talking about the 144,000 Tribulation evangelists. They are not only evangelizing the world, but Israel also. He predicted to them that they were going to have a fruitful ministry.

Look at Revelation 7:14 again: *“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Jesus promised that His Word would not return void. He promised His servants that if they would give out the Word there would be fruit in response to Christ. Revelation 7:13–14 represents the greatest outflow of missionary evangelism in the history of the world.

As His servants, we ought to cling to His promise that we will be fruitful. All we have to do is go tell people, but sometimes we are unwilling. Perhaps this is due to busyness, fear, thinking they wouldn’t be interested, and so forth. If we let him, Satan will happily flood our minds and hearts with excuses to avoid witnessing. It can happen to anyone. For example, someone I led to the Lord always sits in a certain place in our Sunday morning service. When I look in his direction, I am often reminded of how unwilling I was at first to share the gospel with him because I

was so busy. Had I not done so, however, I would have missed the great blessing of seeing that person come to Christ. You and I should never forget that God promises us a fruitful ministry if we will just tell people about Jesus.

Third Element of Salvation—The Spirit Secures His Servants: ... *The Spirit in our hearts [is] as a guarantee* (2 Corinthians 1:22b). I remember so distinctly when I went to the office where my fiancée worked. In my pocket was a little box containing the engagement ring I had finally earned enough money to buy. I had already asked Bonnie to marry me, but she did not know I had a ring with me. We will never forget that diner where we ate lunch that day. After I gave Bonnie the ring, with every bite of food she ate, she displayed it for all to see.

Because I lived 500 miles away from her, I wanted to put a mark of ownership on Bonnie so that no one else could snatch her up. Spiritually, God gives us His pledge by giving us His Holy Spirit who is our “engagement ring” that displays the security of His protection. And He promises to bring us to the wedding day—taking us home to be married to Christ and live with Him forever. That is the threefold cord of our secure salvation: (1) we are signed with the very name of God; (2) we are sealed with the very seal of God; and (3) we are secured by the very presence of God.

Are you being faithful to the One who is to be your beloved Bridegroom?

SATURDAY: Christ Comforts His Servants

*“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for **the Lamb** who is in the midst of the throne **will shepherd them** and lead them to living fountains of waters. And **God will wipe away every tear** from their eyes”* (Revelation 7:16–17, emphasis added).

Jesus shows His love by comforting His servants after all their troubles. In the Great Tribulation, they will be hungry and thirsty, and the sun will scorch them. But in the midst of their suffering, the Spirit of God will draw them, and the Tribulation evangelists will then point them to the Messiah. After Jesus Christ saves them, they will be killed by the Antichrist. What will Jesus do then? He will comfort them. There is nothing like the comforting love of someone who truly cares for us!

Jesus also shows His love by refreshing His servants with His presence. The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them by leading them to living fountains of waters. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Can you see all the elements of His loving provision? He is with them, shepherding them, and refreshing them!

The Comforting Voice of Jesus: It is just like our Lord to speak to us when we need Him the most. His tender “*Fear not!*” can calm the storms in our hearts regardless of the circumstances around us. (Emphasis added in the verses below.)

- **Abraham heard His comforting voice:** ... *The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “**Do not be afraid**, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1).*
- **Isaac heard His comforting voice:** ... *The LORD appeared to him ... and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; **do not fear**, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham’s sake” (Genesis 26:24).*
- **Jacob heard His comforting voice:** *So He said, “I am God, the God of your father; **do not fear** to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there” (Genesis 46:3).*
- **King Jehoshaphat heard His comforting voice:** ... *“**Do not be afraid** nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s. ... Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD ...! ‘**Do not fear** or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you’” (2 Chronicles 20:15, 17b).*
- **Daniel heard His comforting voice:** ... *“**Do not fear**, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.” ... And he said, “O man greatly beloved, **fear not!** Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!” (Daniel 10:12, 19).*
- **Mary heard His comforting voice:** ... *The angel said to her, “**Do not be afraid**, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30).*
- **Peter heard His comforting voice:** ... *Jesus said to Simon, “**Do not be afraid**. From now on you will catch men” (Luke 5:10b).*
- **Paul heard His comforting voice:** *Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “**Do not be afraid**, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9–10).*

Because the Lord prepares His people for troubles, we can see the love of Jesus in all these verses. And you, too, can likewise experience the comfort of God’s Son. The next time you feel alone and defeated, meditate on how the Lord ministered to these saints.

Make a choice to live in hope. What are God’s servants like? They find hope for living in the fact that the loving Christ:

- Wants us to worship Him.
- Wants to refresh us with His presence.
- Wants us to be still before Him.
- Wants us to trust that He knows where we are all the time.
- Wants to prepare us for bad times.
- Wants to comfort us in all our troubles.
- Wants to give us a fruitful ministry.
- Wants us to be with Him for all eternity!

These are all marks of Christ's love. We are His servants, and though we are not Jewish evangelists going through the Tribulation, every one of these elements is what God wants to give us today. He wants us to rejoice that we are signed and sealed and that He is going to safely deliver us home through death, or the glorious Rapture.

Oh, how I pray that you also long to worship this lovely Christ! One way to do that is by meditating upon the words of this beautiful old song:

Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me

*Jesus, Thy boundless love to me
No thought can reach, no tongue declare;
O bind my thankful heart to Thee,
And reign without a rival there:
Thine wholly, Thine alone, I am;
Be Thou alone my constant flame.*

*O grant that nothing in my soul
May dwell but Thy pure love alone;
O may Thy love possess me whole,
My joy, my treasure, and my crown:
All coldness from my heart remove;
May ev'ry act, word, thought, be love.*

*O Love, how gracious is Thy way!
All fear before Thy presence flies;
Care, anguish, sorrow melt away,
Where e'er Thy healing beams arise:
O Jesus, nothing may I see,
Nothing desire, or seek, but Thee.*

—**Paul Gerhardt, 1607–1676;**
tr. John Wesley, 1703–1791

Week 28—See Christ's Patience

(Revelation 8)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you see the patience of Jesus!



SUNDAY: A Great Mystery of Heaven

*When He opened the seventh seal, **there was silence in heaven** for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets* (Revelation 8:1–2, emphasis added).

Revelation 8 explains one of the great mysteries of heaven—how God responds to the prayers of His saints. As we gaze into the inner court of the Lord God Almighty, seven archangels are standing in God's presence. Before His throne there is an amazing silence as the voices of myriads of angels, the heavenly creatures, and the saints heard in chapters 4 and 5 are all strangely silent.

It is as if the coming judgments are so dreadfully frightening, so unsettling, that those surrounding God's throne are struck dumb, and all heaven becomes speechless. There, in a holy hush, the Great High Priest, who ever lives to intercede for us, approaches the throne of God and pours out the prayers of His saints.

In this chapter, we will learn how the patience of Jesus and those powerful prayers of His saints work together to fulfill God's purposes and how the vengeance God has promised to His people is poured out upon sinful earth in heaven's perfect time. We will also learn why we need hope and how we can have it.

Revelation 8 is divided into the following topics:

Verses 1–2: **God Waits—Time to Repent**

Verses 3–5: **God Listens—Time to Pray**

Verses 6–13: **God Responds—Time to Flee**

God Waits—Time to Repent: Unlike us, God is patient. Before the judgment actually starts in Revelation 8:7, He waits a long time. Because we are a people of action, waiting is something that is hard for most of us. But God says that the greatest action that we can perform is being still before Him and praying. The half hour of total silence before the throne of God reminds us that this chapter is about the power of prayer and silence. As we offer our prayers before His throne, we will see God respond to those prayers, the angel pour out the censer, and the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepare themselves to sound as God begins the Tribulation.

What are some of the lessons ahead in this chapter's study? The coming judgments are dreadfully frightening, terribly unsettling, and the earth dwellers will have a horrifying end. The coming judgments should make us humbly reach out to our God of love and mercy while there is still time. Remember: only you can choose your destination. If you have not already humbled yourself before our merciful almighty God, I urge you to do so today!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, how we praise You for being such a patient God! We thank You that there is still time for those who do not yet know You to repent, and to bow and yield themselves to Your great salvation and Lordship over their lives. For You are not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth. Oh Father, as we see into the mysteries of Your inner workings—the relationship between the sacrifice of Christ, the incense of the saints' prayers, and Your vengeance about to be poured out on this planet—may it stir us to greater worship, prayer, and service. Oh, that we might long to worship You in Spirit and in truth! May we never forget that prayer is vital and revered by You, our infinite heavenly Father. May we therefore make it a point to pray without ceasing. May our service be prompted by the fact that all around us are dear souls who are going to exist eternally, either in heaven or hell. So, as we see the horrors coming, help us to be more zealous by laying aside the trifles of life and going out to witness to our family members, friends, and neighbors who do not yet belong to You. To that end, we renew our consecration to You and, as we look into Your Word this week, we anticipate Your promised blessing. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Solar Instabilities Ahead

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and **the powers of the heavens will be shaken**” (Matthew 24:29, emphasis added).*

Before continuing on with the next segment of Revelation 8, let us again consider this question: Are we actually close enough to think that we are the final generation?

Jesus said that the generation that sees His plan unfold for the end of days will witness His Second Coming. That promise has kept the church throughout the centuries in the Word, on

their knees, and ready to go home to heaven at any moment: *“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, **when you see all these things**, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, **this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.** Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away”* (Matthew 24:32–35, emphasis added).

Based on that passage, are we witnessing the unfolding of His plan for the end of days? Do the following happenings have a bearing upon the answer to that question?

- The global travel Daniel said had to happen is here, as well as the explosion of knowledge.
- The apostle John said that there had to be global commerce that was based on buying and selling with a personal number, and that is also here.
- Jesus said that Israel had to be back in their land, and they are there.

In Matthew 24, Jesus foretold that a series of specific signs would occur to signal the onslaught of birth pangs. Have those pains that signal the end of days started? I am not absolutely sure, but this much is clear: not since the birth of Israel in 1948—and not since the birth of the United Nations (also in 1948), United Europe, the World Council of Churches, and the computer—have we seen so many signs happening contemporaneously.

Just since Christmas 2004, a vast majority of the earth's population witnessed the second largest quake ever recorded; the government has warned that we have been observing the largest solar storm measurable; and now, more than ever, we have become aware that the largest threat to global safety may be hurtling through space toward our world right now.

Does all that mean anything? To sort it out, in Matthew 24:29–32 we find that there are three parts to Christ's warning: (1) the sun will be darkened; (2) the stars will fall; and (3) the powers of the heavens will be shaken. We will look at the first two parts today, and then cover the third one tomorrow.

Part 1 of Christ's Warning—“the sun will be darkened”: In the Tribulation, the earth will become scorched, and yet the sun will get darker. This could be massive sunspots that lessen visible light and maximize solar radiation. During the past few years, astronomers have witnessed the greatest solar activities ever recorded. The largest and most powerful solar eruptions have dazzled their instruments and made scientists wonder what is in store for the earth in days ahead. For example, on March 6, 2003 the largest sunspot ever seen developed. In October that year, there was “one of the most dramatic periods of solar activity we have seen in modern time.”¹ Then, on May 15, 2005, we had one of the highest magnitude solar storms (G-5 in solar terms is like an F-5 tornado) sighted by the NOAA Space Environment Center in Boulder, Colorado.

God says that a day is coming when the sun will scorch the inhabitants of the earth: *Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.*

And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory (Revelation 16:8–9).

Though this prophecy is clearly a divine judgment on unrepentant mankind, it is interesting that an event of great enough proportions to alter the earth's atmosphere could also take place due to nuclear war. Were that to occur, there would be "*signs in the sun*" (Luke 21:25) as the sky became partially darkened from the clouds of dust and debris in the upper atmosphere (which could facilitate God's judgment). However, this could also refer to an increase in sunspots and solar flares.

Part 2 of Christ's Warning—"the stars will fall": When Christ returns, there will be global fears of an asteroid or comet strike, and an ensuing devastation. It is interesting that, until more recently, "the ultimate disaster" movie style wasn't common. In previous generations, they were not as aware of the objects hurtling through space faster than bullets and headed our way.

After a lifetime of studying Revelation, and reading as many books and commentaries as possible, I am still not sure whether the following prophecy is the record of a first-century man's description of an atomic bomb, a super powerful demonic creature's attack, or a comet, an asteroid, or a meteorite slamming into the earth. Since this couldn't be an actual solar furnace (like our sun), the Greek word used could stand for any shining object from the sky. But the apostle John definitely saw something hit the earth during the Tribulation: ... *A great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.... a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter* (Revelation 8:10-11).

Whatever this is, it poisons one-third of the earth's fresh water supply, which is the reason it sounds more like the effect of nuclear radiation fallout. But there are some recent discoveries that indicate other possibilities. Hal Lindsey reports that in February 2004 a bill (HR4544) was introduced which mandated "the allocation of \$40 million to survey every near-Earth object 100 meters across or larger."²

May 2004, three months later, a University of Hawaii astronomer, David Tholen, and a team from Arizona University discovered a new near-earth object (space rock) and took photos until storm clouds blocked the skies. Around Thanksgiving 2004, some Australian astronomers spotted the object, found it to be an asteroid, and named it 2004 MN4. A month of calculations later led the astronomers to announce to the world on Christmas Eve that this asteroid was on a direct hit trajectory with the earth.³ On December 28, 2004, "... astronomers announced they had refined their calculations and said that 2004 MN4 probably wouldn't impact the Earth" They speculated that although MN4 will probably miss the earth in 2029 (the time they calculate it will hit or miss the planet), there are no guarantees. In other words, "... a collision with 2004 MN4 remains a definite 'maybe.'"⁴

Of course, the original prediction announced that Christmas Eve was overshadowed by holiday events and was soon buried by the event that occurred two days later—the Sumatran-Andaman earthquake.

In spite of the terrifying events to come, God does not want His children to fear—like those who have no hope: *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7). Trust Him, for He is your safe refuge!

TUESDAY: The Heavens Will Shake!

*“... men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for **the powers of the heavens will be shaken**”* (Luke 21:26, emphasis added).

Not only will the sun be darkened, and the stars fall, but there will also be great earthquakes in various places!

Part 3 of Christ's Warning—“the powers of the heavens will be shaken”: Both natural and supernatural phenomena in the earth and sky appear to be increasing. And when Christ returns there will be cosmic quakes: *“There will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven”* (Luke 21:11).

On December 26, 2004, two days after that amazing prediction about Asteroid 2004 MN₄, our planet was struck by the Sumatran-Andaman earthquake. That quake was so massive that scientists are still analyzing what happened. But this we do know: the earthquake lasted about ten minutes; it is the longest quake ever known, and was the most powerful ever recorded. The quake, centered in the Indian Ocean, created the largest gash in the earth's seabed ever observed. It was the second deadliest quake known to history. The quake was also the second largest to hit our planet (that we are aware of) and is only surpassed by the 1960 Chilean quake.

So we have lived through the second biggest, second deadliest, longest, and most powerful quake ever felt and measured by man. We have been warned that a space rock is headed closer than any has ever been and that it will be the first asteroid visible with the naked eye from earth. And, on May 15, 2005, we had the highest-level solar storm sighted by the NOAA.

Jesus was asked, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” So He ran down the now-familiar list of earthquakes, famines, wars, and pestilences. He said that all of these would come upon the earth like *“birth pangs”* that would increase in frequency and intensity as the time grew near.

Jesus responded, *“There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”* (Luke 21:25–27). In the meantime, He told those who would witness the signs of His return, *“Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near”* (Luke 21:28).

One thing is certain: for the first time man now has the ability to track smaller asteroids that could wreak enormous destruction on this planet. This is creating an increased anxiety over

previously unknown threats from the heavens. This is what Jesus predicted would happen in the last days, and that is precisely why we all need a hope that anchors!

The prophetic signs of Christ's soon coming just keep multiplying. Are you ready to meet Him?⁵

How can you get ready? Live in the hope of Christ's return. Trust Him with your future. Wait upon Him to guide your daily life. Avoid whatever grieves Him. Resist fearing anything but God!

WEDNESDAY: Prayer—a Sweet-Smelling Sacrifice

*Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with **the prayers of all the saints** upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake (Revelation 8:3–5, emphasis added).*

Perhaps the altar spoken of in Revelation 8:3–5 has made you wonder what kind of altar is in heaven. Are there animal sacrifices going on up there? No. Is Jesus offering Himself over and over again in heaven? No. So then, what altar is left? If you look at the setting of this passage, you will see that it is right in front of the throne.

The altar noted seven times in heaven (Revelation 6:9; 8:3 twice; 8:5; 9:13; 14:18 and 16:7) is not an altar of burnt offering. Jesus was offered once; therefore, no animal sacrifices in heaven are needed. The only other altar is the altar of incense. This altar is found in the third and fourth books of Moses (Leviticus 16:12; Numbers 16:46). Do you remember the setting? There was a big tent with an outer courtyard housing a brazen altar and a laver. The inner tent was two-chambered. There was a holy place with a table of showbread and the golden candlesticks that lit it. Then, right in front of the doorway into the Holy of Holies, there was an altar of incense. That incense was always to be rising up before the curtain on the other side of the Holy of Holies, the tiny room of God's presence over the ark of the covenant.

In front of that tiny room of God's presence, where God's shekinah (the glory cloud) hovered over the ark of the covenant, was a hollow, rectangular box, covered with gold, standing three feet high and a foot and one-half square. Along the top of this incense altar was a small rail fence to keep burning coals from tumbling off as the priests came and walked past it. As the High Priest annually came with the bowl of the blood of the atoning sacrifice to be sprinkled on top of the mercy seat, he had to walk by this cloud of incense.

What's amazing is that it is almost as if that priest brought his blood sacrifice surrounded by fragrant incense. Because the incense was offered before the first and last sacrifice, it is like the people's offerings were sent to God tied with fragrant ribbons of perfumed incense smoke. What a beautiful picture of how God wants us to offer our prayers to Him! We are to come

before Him in the name of Jesus Christ. We are to come because of the sacrifice of Christ and His finished work, but this time of fellowship is to be surrounded by the perfume of our prayers and our devotion to Him.

God Listens—Time to Pray: As we just read in Revelation 8:3–5, although Christ is above time, He shows Himself to be God, waiting as He allows the prayers of His saints to arise. Before He acts in vengeance upon the earth, He receives the incense of our prayers as sacrifices rising from the altars of our hearts, a fragrant aroma of perfume from a devoted spirit of worship. This is what the eighth chapter of Revelation is all about: God is waiting for the smoke of the incense of our lives to rise before Him before He will act. How does God, who is sovereign, eternal, and omnipotent, limit Himself to wait? That is part of the mystery of God.

Prayer is an awesome privilege. Do you look on prayer that way? What a captivating thought to see God wait for these prayers to rise before Him in Revelation 8. Even now He seeks the same worship, adoration, devotion, and praise from each of us. Is the altar of your soul burning with fragrant incense to God? Are the coals of your soul glowing with fire for Him? Do your prayers fill His presence with your devotion? Those are some remarkable thoughts that should draw you to bow in your soul before your Creator and speak to Him wonderful words of worship.

Jesus Christ asks us to come before Him with our prayers so that He can act on our behalf. How is the smoke of the fire of your heart doing? Are your prayers incense to Him? Right now, you may have nothing more important to give to God than your prayers. If so, rejoice! Jesus is waiting to capture those prayers as they rise and pour them out before His Father, our Lord God Almighty!

THURSDAY: Waiting Hope

*... Those who **wait on the LORD** shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31, emphasis added).*

Where is your primary citizenship? Is it on earth or in heaven? If your life is tied only to this world, you are an earth dweller. The expression *“those who dwell on the earth”* is found seven times in Revelation (6:10; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:8). It is another term for a worldly person—one who is at home here and wants to live for this doomed planet, and does not want to leave it. Such persons will worship Antichrist and take the mark of the Beast, and will have a horrifying end. They will refuse to repent, harden their hearts, and continue to sin. The apostle Paul describes a worldly person like this: *For many ... are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things* (Philippians 3:18–19). This is someone who lives only for the moment.

God's children, however, are no longer earth dwellers once they come to know Jesus Christ. That is why God hates worldliness in us. Look at how Paul describes the Christian: *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 ... (Philippians 3:20-21).

Do you see the contrast? Earth dwellers will have a horrifying end, but God's children will not. On which side do you want to be?

God Responds—Time to Flee: The coming judgments are extremely frightening! In Revelation 8:6–12, the first through fourth angels sound their trumpets and unleash God's judgments: *hail and fire ... mingled with blood ... were thrown to the earth* (v. 7); the seas are struck with *something like a great mountain burning with fire* (v.8); *a great star fell from heaven ... and many men died from the [poisoned] water* (vv. 10-11); and *the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened* (v. 12).

Now look at Revelation 8:13: *... I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"* God reveals what is to come because He wants us to be jolted by the vivid and inescapable sights of future calamities. He always wants us to soberly look at reality. Thus, He has given us the truth that we need to act upon.

If you are not a born-again Christian yet, it is time to flee the wrath to come, and have a true relationship with a holy God. It is not too late. This very moment you, too, can find living hope for the end of days. You can then profit from one of the most fascinating studies I have ever engaged in—the study of biblical hope.

The Study of Biblical Hope: The Hebrew language of the Old Testament is a rich storehouse of words that define hope. It is filled with examples of what the cause and remedy are for periods of hopelessness. There are four Hebrew words that give us valuable insights into the many ways God can help us live in hope. In English, the four are categorized as: (1) waiting hope; (2) trusting hope; (3) clinging hope; and (4) sheltering hope. Today through Saturday we will examine all four and see how words written thousands of years ago can leap into our lives in the twenty-first century.

Waiting Hope: In Lamentations 3, we find the first of the four Hebrew words for hope—*qavah*⁶: *... Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him* (Lamentations 3:21–25, emphasis added).

The Hebrew word *qavah* describes "waiting hope"—**hope that renews exhausted strength**. The original idea of this verb "wait" was to twist or to stretch something. It was associated with the twisting and stretching of weak strands into a strong rope. From this, the word metaphorically developed into the idea of "enduring under tension." That concept sprung from the fact that even a weak thread twisted together with a rope became strong. The belief grew that as we hope in the Lord's promises, we are woven into His strength and strengthened to withstand the stresses of life.

The most well-known verse in the Bible using this special word *qavah* is Isaiah 40:31: ... *Those who **wait** on the LORD shall renew their strength ...* (emphasis added). The major shade of meaning in this verse is “waiting in the expectant *hope* and being strengthened thereby.” One margin note renders it “who *hope* in the Lord,” which is more accurate. A sure hope in the future enables a person to have superhuman strength: *He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who [hope in] the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint* (Isaiah 40:29–31).

This is exactly the same word and hope that the patriarch Jacob testified about at the end of his 147-year-long life of troubles, stress, and disasters: “***I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!***” (Genesis 49:18, emphasis added).

King David, in writing the Psalms, uses this word for hope more frequently than any other biblical writer. It actually was one of the keys to success in David’s life. He recognized that his human strength was never enough to meet the stresses of life.⁷ (Emphasis added in the following verses.)

In Psalm 25:3, we see that waiting hope delivers us from being ashamed of hard times: *Indeed, **let no one who waits on You be ashamed**; let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.* Waiting hope also makes each day’s troubles into a lesson from God just for us: *Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; **on You I wait** all the day* (Psalm 25:5).

Psalm 27:14 reveals that waiting hope can give us the strength we need so that we do not lose heart: ***Wait on the LORD**; be of good courage, and **He shall strengthen your heart**; wait, I say, on the LORD!* (Psalm 27:14). And waiting hope promises us that we have victory through the Lord: *For evildoers shall be cut off; but **those who wait on the LORD**, they shall inherit the earth. Wait on the LORD, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it* (Psalm 37:9, 34).

In summary, waiting hope focuses our lives upon the Lord (Psalm 39:7), assures us that He is hearing us (Psalm 40:1), and draws us back into God’s Word (Psalm 130:5). Are you experiencing waiting hope today? Is your life focused on the Lord and His Word? Wait on the Lord—and He will give you the living hope you need to triumph in the end of days!

FRIDAY: Trusting Hope

Trust in the Lord** with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and **He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5–6, emphasis added).

The coming judgments are terribly unsettling: we are powerless before an angry God. There is nothing that can stop His plan, His judgment, and earth's ultimate dissolution as a planet. For that reason, more than ever we need to find hope that anchors us during these turbulent times.

Trusting Hope: The second of the Hebrew words for hope is *yachal*.⁸ The Hebrew word *yachal* describes “trusting hope”—**hope that produces great endurance**. The root idea of this word is to wait for something. It came to mean “an expectant waiting under extreme pressure.” The scholar R. B. Girdlestone says, “Yachal occurs several times in the Book of Job and signifies a long patient waiting.”⁹ A study of the usage of this word in Job gives the most accurate connotations. He was a man going through extreme tribulation. In rapid succession he lost his great wealth, his children, and his health. Job suffered incredible and constant physical and mental pain. Yet in the most well-known verse using this special word for hope, he said this: “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*” (Job 13:15a, emphasis added). From this, we learn that trusting hope guards us from despair.

In Job 13:15 “the word *yachal* means to keep on hoping with endurance under extreme pressure. Job’s hope in the Lord enabled him to endure and be stabilized even under adverse conditions.”¹⁰ (Emphasis added in the following verses.)

As Hebrews 16:19 says, trusting hope anchors our souls in heaven. Job believed in trusting hope when he said, *If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes* (Job 14:14). Trusting hope strengthens us: *Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD* (Psalm 31:24).

In Psalm 33 we find that trusting hope invites God’s blessings: *Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us, just as we hope in You* (Psalm 33:18, 22). Trusting hope also opens our lives to magnify the Lord: *But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more* (Psalm 71:14). And trusting hope points us back to God’s Word: ... *Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances. Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope* (Psalm 119:43, 49; see also 119:74).

In summary, trusting hope keeps believing even when there is no visible thing in life that points to a possibility of hope, like Noah did in the ark (“*So he waited*”—Genesis 8:12). Trusting hope gives us a reason to go on, a reason to smile, a reason to bless others with the strength that God alone can give (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5). And trusting hope assures us that God hears us (Psalm 38:15). What an anchor!

SATURDAY: Clinging and Sheltering Hope

He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord (Psalm 112:7, emphasis added).

The coming judgments should make us humbly reach out to our God of love and mercy while there is time. If you listen carefully, the compassionate voice of Jesus is heard all through

Revelation, which is a book of woe. He calls John to not be afraid, and He calls the wayward church members to repent and return to Him. It is Jesus who knocks patiently for us, awaiting our fellowship. It is Jesus who sends His witnesses in chapter 7. It is Jesus who sends warnings of doom, the two witnesses of chapter 11, the angel preaching the everlasting gospel in chapter 16, and so on. Jesus is crying out: "While there is time, hear My voice. Do not harden your hearts!" Jesus does not want anyone to perish.

Only you can choose your destination. As the Bible opens, Jesus is seeking His lost ones in the Garden of Eden saying, "*Where are you?*" (Genesis 3:9); the Bible ends with Jesus calling, *Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (Revelation 22:17c). Over and over He has extended His invitation. All you need to do is come to Him. You choose your eternal destiny.

One of the most fearful things in the universe is the free will to say yes or no to God. Why? Because you will be eternally held accountable for how you willfully choose to respond to God, who waits silently before He pours out His judgment on this planet. Right now, there is still time to cling to the Lord, but don't delay. Jesus could come back today.

Clinging Hope: The third of the Hebrew words for hope is *batach*.¹¹ The Hebrew word *batach* describes "clinging hope"—**hope that inspires deeper trust**. The most well-known verse using this special word is Proverbs 3:5: **Trust** [literally cling to] *the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding ...* (emphasis added).

Here *batach* is used in the sense of hope that comes from casting one's total future upon God like a little child and trusting Him for everything. This word is most often translated to trust or to have confidence in someone, usually God. But in some contexts it is definitely used to mean hope, as in the great prophetic twenty-second psalm. The Messiah's thoughts while suffering on the cross are predicted here: *But thou [God] art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me HOPE [batach] when I was upon my mother's breasts* (Psalm 22:9 KJV).¹² (Emphasis added in the following verses.)

Clinging hope assures that God is at work: **Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass** (Psalm 37:3–5). In Psalm 40:3 we see that clinging hope can put a song in our hearts that flows out of our lives even in hard times: *He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust* [cling to] *the LORD* (Psalm 40:3).

Clinging hope counteracts and removes our fears: *Whenever I am afraid, I will trust* [cling to] *You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?* (Psalm 56:3–4). And clinging hope calms us in whatever trying situation we face: *He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting* [clinging to] *the LORD* (Psalm 112:7).

Sheltering Hope: The fourth and final of the Hebrew words for hope is *chasah*.¹³ The Hebrew word *chasah* describes "sheltering hope"—**hope that offers a secure refuge**. The most well-known verse in the Bible using this special word is Ruth 2:12: *"The LORD repay your work, and a*

*full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come **for refuge***” (emphasis added).

This is a beautiful word for hope. Its root meaning is “to seek shelter, refuge, or protection in something or someone.”¹⁴ It is used frequently to portray little animals taking refuge in the cleft of a rock, as in Psalm 104:18: *The high hills are for the wild goats; the cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers.*

Figuratively, it came to be used of man’s taking refuge in God from the spiritual, emotional, and physical dangers of life. On a few occasions, this concept is translated HOPE. In Proverbs 14:32, this is used in a unique way: The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death (KJV). When the one who has been declared righteous by believing in Jesus as his Savior faces death, he will have a hope that is a refuge from the uncertainty and fear presented by his own death.¹⁵ (Emphasis added in the following verses.)

Sheltering hope is a defense and refuge in troublesome times: *“The God of my strength, **in whom I will trust**; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My Savior, You save me from violence. ... As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield **to all who trust in Him**”* (2 Samuel 22:3, 31). In Psalm 7:1, we find that sheltering hope is also a refuge in times of persecution: *O LORD my God, **in You I put my trust**; save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me*

Sheltering hope gives confidence and peace to persevere in tough times: *In the LORD **I put my trust**; how can you say to my soul, “Flee as a bird to your mountain?”* (Psalm 11:1). Psalm 31:1–2 tells us that sheltering hope gives boldness in our prayers: *In You, O LORD, **I put my trust**; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness. Bow down your ear to me, deliver me speedily; be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me* (Psalm 31:1–2).

Sheltering hope provides security and confidence in calamitous times: *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul **trusts** in You; and in the shadow of Your wings **I will make my refuge**, until these calamities have passed by* (Psalm 57:1). And sheltering hope is a safe haven from our enemies: *In You, O LORD, **I put my trust**; let me never be put to shame. Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me, and save me* (Psalm 71:1–2).

Make a choice to live in hope. In Revelation 8 we have seen that earth dwellers will experience a horrifying end of dreadfully frightening and unsettling judgments. The coming judgments should make us humbly reach out to our merciful and loving God while there is still time. We can find waiting hope, trusting hope, clinging hope, and sheltering hope in our patient Christ who is a shelter midst the storms of life. He is a solid Rock where we can find safety when we are assailed from without and within! The words of this old song, “The Solid Rock,” beautifully express the hope that is ours in Christ. If your heart has been especially touched by the loving patience of Jesus this week, I encourage you to sing these words worshipfully to your precious Redeemer!

The Solid Rock

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

*When darkness seems to hide His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.*

*His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.*

*When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.*

*On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

—**Edward Mote, 1797–1874**

Week 29—Watch Christ's Judgment

(Revelation 9)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you watch the judgment of Jesus!



SUNDAY: Enduring Hope in Jesus

*“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But **he who endures to the end will be saved**” (Matthew 10:22, emphasis added).*

When Jesus commissioned His disciples to go forth in their work for Him, in verse 22b above, He was basically telling them: “He who perseveres under stress and trials by abiding and remaining in Me will be saved.” In the last days, Jesus says that this will characterize those who are really His children. Thus, no matter what happens before or during the Great Tribulation—His true children *will* endure.

Jesus also said that the generation who sees His plan unfold for the end of days will witness His Second Coming. How can we best get ready for that momentous event? We need to have *waiting hope* for Christ’s return. We need to have *trusting hope* for whatever is to come in our future. We need to have *clinging hope* in Jesus as our all-wise guide for daily life, and avoid whatever grieves Him. And through *sheltering hope*, we must resist fear, for Christ is our safe and secure eternal refuge. In summary, what we need to believe today is what Jesus taught: this world is not our home.

Our real home is the one our master architect, Jesus, went to prepare for us (John 14:2–3), and He says that “moving day” is fast approaching. But until then, we can try to wondrously imagine our brand-new home—a mingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the earthly and the more-than-earthly. For heaven is a place, but not exactly like earthly places. It contains recognizable features, but the strangeness and transcendence keep alive our awareness that earthly images do not exist in the ordinary manner in heaven.

I love the way this author expresses his thoughts on heaven: “Oh, the wonders of our promised Haven, the glories of that eternal Home! But nothing will compare with the knowledge that Heaven

is just the outflow of Him. In each aspect ... concerning that heavenly City, we see a character trait of Him, our Savior. Let us seek Him, and in the words of the song-writer so true: 'Tis heaven below, my Redeemer to know, For He is so precious to me.'"¹

How exciting it is to contemplate these comforting elements of heaven as presented in this excerpt from a commencement address by Harold Lindsell: "The last thing will not be bombs, but blessings; not war, but peace; not uncertainty, but confidence; not sickness, but health; not weakness, but strength; not longing, but satisfaction; not sorrow, but joy; not weariness, but vigor. There's a great time coming, so let us lift up our heads and our hearts, for the day of our redemption draweth nigh."²

What should talk about heaven mean to us in the twenty-first century? Simply this: if the simultaneous increase in catastrophic storms, massive earthquakes, deadly pestilences, wars of terror, and looming threats from objects in outer space are indeed some of the "*birth pangs*" Christ spoke about, then meditating on heaven's glories can be very reassuring. Such thoughts in turn will promote waiting, trusting, clinging, sheltering hope—the hope that anchors—*enduring hope!*

My Prayer for You This Week: *I thank You, dear Father, that You are the God of hope. But I pray for those who do not understand what I am talking about because they have never responded to Your offer, "Come unto Me all You that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That was a gracious offer with Your outstretched arms of salvation. I hope in You because I know You, because I know that I have responded to You and that You live within me. I belong to You, but if there are those who do not share that hope, may they flee to You, oh Christ. If they don't know how, may they simply say, "Jesus, I come to You." I pray that no one would hear of Your great salvation and refuse to come. As for we who know You, may You be working in us so that we wait in hope, that we trust in hope, and that You will see us through the even gloomier days ahead for this planet. May we hold forth the Word of God and shine as a light until the day of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Jesus and the Angels of Doom

*... And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And **he opened the bottomless pit**, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit (Revelation 9:1–2, emphasis added).*

In chapter 9, the apostle John introduces us to the dreadful realm of the fallen spirits and their abode: the abyss. At this point, the fifth angel sounds the fifth trumpet, which is a preview of hell—endless darkness. This bottomless pit is the holding tank of punishment for the fallen

angels, demons, the beast, the false prophet, and Satan (Revelation 9:1–2, 11; 11:7; 20:1–3). These spirit-beings of the highest magnitude of evil are left over from Satan's rebellion.

Jude tells us that some of these evil spirit-beings tried to corrupt the human race so that the promised Seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, could never come. Others seem to be key leaders of Satan's forces, while still others have been so vile that they have been held back until Revelation 9. Like Satan, these demonic spirit-beings are filled with a hatred for God and mankind.

The success of Satan's mission "*to steal, and to kill, and to destroy*" is evident throughout the history of planet Earth. From the time Cain slew his brother, Abel (Genesis 4:8), strife and bloodshed among men has never ceased to exist. But not until Assyria was there a society that conquered in a global way. After the Assyrian conquests, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek armies sowed blood, broken bodies, and death across the face of the earth. In cold, calculated, and cruel efficiency, the Romans then fought and won the world we know.

By the thirteenth century, inhabitants of Asia were mesmerized by the Khans, and the Mongol Empire was carved across the continents, leaving an estimated ten million dead in its path. Five hundred years later, Napoleon ravaged Europe for twenty years, resulting in a death toll of five million as his armies blindly followed him. The most vivid despot, however, is the strange little man who hypnotized some of the most sophisticated and civilized cultures on the planet into becoming barbaric butchers of humanity. Hitler caused upwards of fifty million deaths, six million of them being the gassed and murdered people of promise—the Jews.

Those are dark pages in history—and Satan and his forces have relished every single page so far. But far worse is yet to come. If Revelation 9:1–2 and 11, Revelation 11:7, and Revelation 20:1 and 3 are taken literally, then God has designed an impregnable fortress that holds the most fearsome creatures existing anywhere in the universe. This abyss, or bottomless pit, is only an intermediate step before the final abode of the prince of darkness and all his followers. In Revelation 20, the final place of terror is the lake of fire—the gehenna or hell Jesus spoke of so often in His warnings scattered throughout the Gospels. The fallen Lucifer, Satan himself, will be given permission to open the dungeon of demons and loose the legions of terrors. That is a dreadfully frightening prospect for the earth dwellers!

The apostle Peter warns us to keep alert: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away ...; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness ...? (2 Peter 3:10-11).*

The coming judgment should motivate you to conduct yourself in the light of eternity, and deploy yourself for God. In these end days, you have the greatest opportunity of all time! Before it is too late, talk to others about Christ and read the Scriptures to them. Be available for divine appointments to lead men, women, and children to the Lord. In other words, I exhort you to be a Christlike example who will draw others to Jesus!

Here are some practical choices you can make for how to live godly every day until the end. Note these five points in 2 Peter 3:10-18:

1. **Keep alert.** Staying alert should encourage you to live a godly life (vv. 10-11).
2. **Build a fireproof life.** Don't fear the day of God, but eagerly look forward to it. Forsake materialism and other worldly interests, and invest in that which lasts forever (vv. 12-13).
3. **Look up.** Live purely by expecting the Lord's return at any moment (v. 14).
4. **Study the Book.** God's Word will help you guard your heart and encourage mature living (v. 17).
5. **Obey Jesus.** If you love Him, you will obey Him. That is essential if you wish to grow spiritually (v. 18).

Suggestion: write the five points above in your Bible, and then refer back to them regularly until you habitually live by each of these truths. If you do, God will greatly bless you for it!

TUESDAY: A Preview of Hell—Relentless Terror

Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power (Revelation 9:3, emphasis added).

As the shaft leading downward is unlocked, the infernal smoke of the pit will billow out of the darkness and unleash the pent-up fury of hell. When that pit is opened, locusts will emerge like the smoke of a furnace. With the most destructive imagery known to man, the apostle John described the creatures as locusts.

Because locusts were such relentless destroyers, no plague was more fearsome in the ancient world. Truly, the day of the Lord, portrayed in this short prophetic oracle's revelation through God's Spirit, is a day that is to be heeded. God clearly demonstrates the need for repentance and the physical disaster that must follow moral disintegration.

As a vehicle of judgment, three times God uses locusts as a plague of horrific proportions:

1. Moses unleashed an eighth plague on Egypt—locusts that horribly devoured every green thing left after the hail (Exodus 10:4, 12-14, 19).
2. God sent a plague of locusts on Israel that horribly destroyed all that was green and thus caused economic devastation as well (Joel 1-2).
3. The fifth trumpet will sound the release from the abyss of horrible demonic hordes of locusts (Revelation 9:3, 7).

Today, few readers of the book of Joel are likely to experience a locust plague. With current eradication methods, a locust swarm in modern Israel is indeed a rare phenomenon. In ancient times, however, the land of Israel was frequently subject to invasions by the desert locust, *Schistocerca gregaria*. Exodus 10:1–20 describes the locust as perhaps nature's most awesome example of the collective destructive power of a species. Adult locusts weigh a maximum of two grams, and yet their combined destructive force can leave thousands of people in famine for years. The locust plagues were very much feared in ancient Egypt. So much so that the peasants were in the habit of praying to the locust god, for Satan likes to keep superstitious peoples enslaved to his demonic horde's evil powers.

John J. Davis reports that "A swarm can contain over a billion creatures that, all together, can weigh more than three million pounds. One locust, with his colleagues, form gregarious marching bands up to ten miles wide and ten miles long. The marching bands move forward at a slow cadence, perhaps no more than 250 feet per hour, and may travel no farther than fifteen miles from their staging area. But within their path the hoppers may consume virtually every tender blade of grass or legume. The extraordinary appearance of this marching band with its mass of tiny pullulating bodies can be unnerving, to say the least. In the words of Joel, 'Before them earth trembles, Heaven shakes ...' (Joel 2:10). The marching bands are oblivious to obstacles: 'They rush up the wall, they dash about in the city; They climb into the houses, They enter like thieves by way of the windows'" (Joel 2:9).³

As we contemplate the horrors ahead, we need to make sure to build our lives upon the Rock, and not upon the sands of life that will sweep us away in the storms. We should live expectantly to hasten the coming of the Lord. How can we hasten the day of God? Jesus will return when the last person to become a part of His church is saved. In light of that, every time I kneel to pray with someone who wants to be born again, I expectantly think: *Maybe this is the last one whom God will save before Jesus calls His church home!*

Do you want to hasten heaven? Lead people to Christ! Build a fireproof life: don't live for what is here on earth, because all this is going to pass away. That is how to best get ready for the end!

WEDNESDAY: The Fearsome Symbol of the Locust

*And they were not given authority to kill them [humans], but to torment them for five months. **Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion** when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them* (Revelation 9:5–6, emphasis added).

The time limit God gives these horrible creatures is the same as the normal life cycle of a physical locust. (It is interesting that this plague lasts the same duration as the flood waters of Genesis 8:1.) After five months, these creatures will be swept back, presumably to where they came from, and God will again close the pit.

Locust plagues were so dreaded in ancient times that even the Hebrew vocabulary used to describe locusts as fearsome. There are six different Hebrew words for locust, and each is sobering:

1. *Gazam*—**shearer**: This portrays the machine that makes a destructive path of sheared-off living plants left in the wake of these monsters.
2. *Arbel*—**swarmer**: This is a reference to the innumerable hordes that darken the sky as a black cloud.
3. *Hasil*—**finisher**: This refers to the devastating aftermath of all green plants finished off by the army that passes.
4. *Solam*—**annihilator**: This is another glimpse of how those who saw these hordes described their work.
5. *Hargol*—**galloper**: This notes the incredible speed with which they pour out unstoppable destruction across the face of the earth.
6. *Tzelatzel*—**creaker**: This reminds us that locusts are ominously heard creaking toward you long before they are seen.

The people who lived in the ancient world dreaded these locusts. They would thus declare that the shearing, swarming, finishing, annihilating, galloping, and creaking army was coming toward them! And that is what God sends in Revelation 9, but He does so by way of the demonic army.

In Revelation 9:7–10, the shape of these creatures is like horses prepared for battle. John was grasping for words to describe monsters that can fly like locusts, gallop around like horses, carry a venomous sting like scorpions, look somewhat human with hair, and bite with sharpness like a lion. These horrible and ghastly creatures will do great damage to humanity!

Revelation 9:11 tells us: *They had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.* In Hebrew, *Abaddon* means “Destruction”; in Greek, *Apollyon* means “Destroyer.” Thus, leading the most horrible assault ever launched on mankind will be the Destroyer himself—the one who defected from the holy presence of God to decay into the murderous liar and hater of truth—the chief officer of Satan, or perhaps even the old Dragon himself. Most likely this is one of the arch-fallen angels. As Jesus has said, Satan wants to steal God’s blessings.

The absolute contrast between Jesus and the devil is seen in John 10:10: *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”* When Satan is allowed to do what he wants to do on this planet, he steals the joy of humanity: he destroys life as we know it, and he kills human beings. But Jesus said, *“... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”*

Jesus says the contrast couldn’t be greater: Satan offers to steal everything you have that is worthwhile, destroy anything that is of value, and to kill you. He robs people of true joy and offers them only emptiness. He destroys their virtue and purity. If they follow that path long enough, it

leads to death and eternal separation from God in hell. But Jesus said, "If you come to Me, I will give you an abundantly overflowing life that just won't stop." That is what Jesus offers.

Which offer sounds best to *you*? How foolish it is for anyone to purposefully make any other choice than to receive the eternal hope that is found in Jesus Christ alone. Are you ready to meet Him?

THURSDAY: How to Build a Fireproof Life

*But [those] ... who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent of the works of their hands**, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their **murders** or their **sorceries** or their **sexual immorality** or their **thefts** (Revelation 9:20-21, emphasis added).*

Armies that dwarf all that ever marched are poised, even now, awaiting a moment known only to God. As the sixth angel sounds, the ultimate weapon will be unleashed: angels of doom by the hundreds of millions. These cosmic warriors will be unstoppable and deadly! They will need no weapons, no food, no vehicles, and no rest; and in their wake will fall more than all wars have ever killed. Yet, horribly, the earth dwellers will miss the message and change nothing. They will still turn their backs on God to worship themselves and the demons that have cruelly enslaved them in hatred and lust.

The two-thirds of humanity that Jesus mercifully spares will respond no better than those in hell who gnash their teeth—as Jesus said seven times when He described the horrible place the hard-hearted would go (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Their gnashing implies the hatred of an unrepentant heart poured out at God's judgment. They would not bow their knee when they were alive and breathing; they will not bow their knee other than the forced bowing at the judgment seat; and they will not bow in hell—for even then there will still be gnashing of teeth against God.

What will control the culture at the end of days? Revelation 9:20-21 reveals five striking evils that will grip the souls of humanity in those dark days:

1. **Godlessness:** Mankind will still willfully push the Creator out of their minds. Instead, these terrified earth dwellers will worship demons and the works of their hands: idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk. Wherever idols are worshiped, even in churches today, those are demons. Whenever an idol gives deliverance from whatever is prayed for, it is a demon providing that deliverance. God does not operate through idols. Whether it is Far East or American Indian idols, or idols of religious American churchgoers, those are demons that are being worshiped.

2. **Callousness:** Even when people are dying by the thousands and millions and hundreds of millions, people will still be murdering one another.
3. **Mindlessness:** The word “sorceries” in verse 21 is actually *pharmakeia*, which means “druggings, sorceries.” Drugs have always been around. There have always been those who have consistently relied on the effects of drugs on their minds. And in this horrible hour, with the message of God calling the world to repentance, people will still be mindlessly following their drug-induced stupors and sorceries.
4. **Licentiousness:** Sexual immorality will abound. During this time of judgment, without the preaching of God’s Word that produces righteous influences, evil perversions will run rampant throughout society.
5. **Lawlessness:** While everything is burning, and the demon creatures are killing people, the homes and businesses of those who are killed are looted. Theft abounds!

All the above evils are prompted by a lust for pleasure, a lust for power, a lust for possessions, and a lust to maintain personal pride at the expense of God and others.

If you want to build a fireproof life, humble yourself because “*God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. ... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:6b-8a, 10).

FRIDAY: When Life Becomes Overwhelming

Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!” The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him (Lamentations 3:22–25, emphasis added).

The very anticipation of catastrophic world events on top of everyday personal trials can be so overwhelming that at times it may *feel* like life is just too painful to even go on. Have you ever felt that way? Jeremiah did. In the Old Testament, without all the benefits and blessings we have in this church age, he lived through a life in shambles, friends all dead, and the stench of destruction all around everything he held dear—yet he lived in hope. How can that be?

True children of God endure under affliction. The Greek word for endure, *hupomeno*, is a very interesting word. In fact, I want to give you the privilege of sharing in one of the most spectacular things that I like to do through the Bible: see the *annologgia scriptura*—the analogy of the Scripture as one Scripture explains another Scripture, and it all fits together like a beautiful woven tapestry.

Consider this association: The word *meno*, which is used all through John 15, means “to abide.” In the Greek language, putting a preposition that amplifies, like *hupo*, in front of a verb like *meno*, gives this meaning: “to abide under something.” It means “to abide when you’re being squashed, when you’re being pressed, to super-abide when things are not the way that you wanted them, or expected, or hoped them to be.”

Endure (*hupomeno*) is used only eighteen times in the New Testament, and it is used to describe a genuine believer’s response to dreadful and fearsome times, such as when the world is falling apart, as Matthew 24 describes. Some may wonder what “enduring under affliction” means. Let’s follow this beautifully illustrated trail through the New Testament to find out:

(Emphasis added to the following verses.)

Mark 13:13: “*You will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But **he who endures** to the end shall be saved.*” This verse is a parallel to Matthew 24: it is from the same sermon, the same context, and the same event when Jesus is speaking the Olivet Discourse. The thirteenth verse of both chapters is identical. The verse reflects the response of a true believer, one who endures or abides in Christ under trials.

Romans 12:12: [Be] *rejoicing in hope, **patient in** tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer* The bold portion is *hupomeno*, which means “abiding under difficulty.” The evidence of a true believer is that he or she patiently and superbly abides in Christ when going through tribulation.

I am often asked: Are Christians going to go through the Great Tribulation? We will not be attacked and stung by all the horrific demon hoards from the pit that opens in Revelation 9. However, we will all experience *thlipsis*, which is the word for Tribulation that pictures something being squashed. If you’ve ever gotten your hand painfully shut in a door, you could say that it was *thlipsis*ed, or squashed by incredible pressure. That is what Tribulation is, and when we are undergoing incredible pressures we are to rejoice in hope, and abide faithfully (*hupomeno*), regardless of the situation (Romans 12:12).

Our American mentality thinks that because we are going to be in the Rapture, we’re going to miss all suffering. We will miss the Great Tribulation, but we are not going to miss the tribulation shaping up in our world that is hostile to the gospel. The Muslim faith is committed to opposing everything we believe, and Satan is seeking to erase us from this planet. So we all need to *hupomeno*—to abide faithfully in difficulties with enduring hope as we continue steadfastly in prayer.

First Corinthians 13:7: [Love] *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, **endures all things**.* This is about the love that Christ implants in our hearts at salvation. When we have Christ and His love shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, we will bear all things, believe all things, and have enduring hope in all things

Second Timothy 2:10, 12: ***Therefore I endure** all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ... If **we endure**, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.* This is saying: “I will endure or abide

faithfully in whatever I am called to go through. I will faithfully hope and trust in the Lord.” Christians who are characterized by perseverance will also reign with Christ.

Hebrews 12:2–3, 6–7: [Be] *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. For consider **Him who endured** such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ... “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” If **you endure** chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?* This passage is a beautiful picture of Christ’s ministry for us. He remained super-faithful under all He was going through, and endured the pain and shame of the cross to the end.

To prevent becoming weary and discouraged in our own trials, we need to consider all that Jesus went through for us. He was both 100 percent God and 100 percent human. In His humanity, God’s grace was sufficient for Him, just as it is for us. One of the things we must endure is God’s chastening of sin in our lives, which is an evidence of salvation. God hates sin, so He says: “I will punish it. I will not allow you to continue in unrepentant sin. If you endure the chastening by abiding in Me until I’ve finished what I want to accomplish in you, that is a sign you’re My child.” If you don’t endure God’s correction, are never chastened, and habitually choose to run toward sin rather than flee from it, that is a sign you may not belong to Christ.

James 1:12: *Blessed is the **man who endures** temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* James, the brother of Jesus, was the pastor of the first church at Jerusalem. He wrote to his people who were fresh out of Pentecost. If we are faithful under tribulation, under trials, under whatever we have to go through in life to please God, we will receive the crown of life.

So regardless of what you face this week, this month, or this year, grab hold of God’s overflowing hope. Let Him weave your weaknesses, like fragile fibers, in with the countless strands of His promises in the Scriptures to stretch and twist you into waiting hope. And then, when troubles increase, let Him bring you a fresh portion of His hope and goodness as you wait, and enduringly find hope in Christ!

SATURDAY: The Hope That Anchors

*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, emphasis added).

Do we really believe this assurance? In our testimonies and prayers, and even in some of the songs we sing, we seem to enjoy talking about our little troubles and difficulties, multiplying and magnifying them. This almost sounds like we’re *spiritual* hypochondriacs. At such times, perhaps we have simply lost sight of the waiting, trusting, clinging, and sheltering hope that is ours in Christ—the hope that endures and anchors our souls during trials.

In the seventeenth century, a model example of one who possessed the enduring hope that anchors is seen in the life of Martin Rinkart—a pastor at Eilenberg, Saxony, during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). Because Eilenberg was a walled city, it became a severely overcrowded refuge for political and military fugitives. As a result, the entire city suffered from famine and disease. In 1637, a great pestilence swept through the area that resulted in the death of around eight thousand persons, including Rinkart's wife. At that time he was forty-one, widowed, and the only minister left in Eilenberg because the others had either died or fled. Rinkart alone conducted the burial services for 4,480 people, sometimes as many as forty or fifty a day!

From that horror came one of the great hymns we possess as Christ's church:

Now Thank We All Our God

*Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mothers' arms, Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.*

*O may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills In this world and the next.*

*All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, And shall be ever more. Amen.*

—*Martin Rinkart*

We may well ask why all his dramatic experience and difficulty is not reflected in Rinkart's hymn. Had the good pastor seen so much stark tragedy that he had become insensitive to human needs and problems? Of course not. He simply had come to believe that God's providence is always good, no matter how much we are tempted to doubt it.

Make a choice to live in hope. As a Christian, a favorite and often-quoted Bible verse is Romans 8:28. At the beginning of today's devotional, that reference appears in the New King James Version.

In the unclear world of tomorrow, it is entirely possible that "fitting into His plan" means that we as Christians may experience great difficulty, persecution, and even war and death. We should therefore prepare ourselves and our families for this possibility, so that if such trials

come, we might face them with the hope that anchors—in spiritual victory that gives testimony, like Pastor Rinkart’s, that ours is a faith that works.

Rinkart’s experience and his hymn wonderfully confirm these words of the apostle Paul: *“What can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship, Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? ... I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:35–39, New English Bible).

If you will memorize and meditate upon that passage, God will ground you in this, His living hope that anchors: nothing can separate us from the love of Christ!