

Week 30—Behold the Mystery of Jesus

(Revelation 10)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you behold the mystery of Jesus!



SUNDAY: The Mystery of Jesus

I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire
(Revelation 10:1 NASB).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ gives God's record of history from the founding of Christ's church until the end of the earth and the ushering in of heaven. The more you read Revelation the simpler it is.

Chapters 1–3 deal with the church age—God revealing Himself to the seven churches through the Lord Jesus Christ in all His Resurrection glory.

In chapters 4–5, God shifts the scene away from earth and takes us heavenward by means of Christ's promised coming to take His bride home. This is a beautiful portrait of the Rapture of the church—the instantaneous removal of all His saints from this planet. The saints will then stand before the glassy sea and the beautiful emerald-surrounded throne as Jesus takes the multi-sealed book, the title deed of the universe, and starts claiming back all that the god of this world, Satan, has usurped.

Chapters 6–19 reveal the horrors of God's wrath upon sin and sinners. Chapters 6–9 show the six seals and the first six trumpets, and then there is an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet (Revelation 10:1–11:14). This is so important for understanding God's plan. Chapter 10 is part of a silence where God steps back and shows little parenthetical pictures. It is critical for understanding *the mystery of God* (not *a mystery*).

The chapter we'll be studying this week, Revelation 10, discloses the preparations for the second half of the Tribulation that begins by means of the seventh trumpet. Having taken back His earth,

The Mystery of God in the Flesh (Colossians 2:2–3): The incarnation of the Son of God was a truth not fully revealed in the Old Testament. Isaiah 9:6 declared that God would come, but it did not explain that He would be a person walking around on the earth.

The Mystery of Iniquity (2 Thessalonians 2:7): This refers to sin and how it grows and permeates. Revelation 17 speaks of the mystery of Babylon—the terrible, vile economic and religious system of the end times; and the mystery age will be completed when Christ returns in glory (Revelation 10:7).

The Biggest Mystery of All Human History: Why has God permitted evil? The answer comes in Revelation 10 as the Lord makes a vow that this mystery will be finished—there will be no more delay!

Have you ever read *Robinson Crusoe*? In that classic, Robinson Crusoe teaches English to his servant named Friday, and then tells him about God. Here is basically what Robinson said: “There is a great and mighty God. He is possessor of the entire universe. He is powerful over all.” Then he told him that there is a devil, so Friday asked, “If God is so great, why is there a devil?” Robinson did not answer because he said it could not be answered—it is a mystery.

Why *didn't* God do away with the devil in the Garden of Eden or in the wilderness of temptation?

When God flooded the earth and killed everyone but Noah's family, did all the generations that followed believe and follow the Lord? No. Just a few generations after the Flood, they built the Tower of Babel in a group rebellion.

After Moses destroyed the Egyptians in the most public and visible spectacle of divine proportions, did Egypt have a national revival? Did they turn in faith and repentance to the Lord? No.

As Jesus did wonderful miracles and signs that no one could even question, did everyone turn in faith and repentance to Him as the Lord? Did the nation of Israel trust, obey, and follow Him as Messiah? No.

The apostles went out across the world with supernatural power, healing the sick, raising the dead, and speaking with the unquestionable authority of God. Did all the nations they visited turn in faith and repentance to the Lord? No.

Is it any wonder that the descendants of those who survived the Flood—the families of the empire of Egypt, the children of Jesus' day, and the generations born to those who saw and heard the apostles—are any less hard-hearted? They see wonders, hear marvelous things, and experience the indisputable hand of God but turn from it. Oh, the mystery of the human will—so blinded by willful sin!

As you read Revelation 10, it may surprise you to know that in the entire span of time from Creation until now, God has never reigned on earth. Yes, He is the sovereign King over the entire universe, over both heaven and earth, but He has never stood on the planet and been visibly in charge with everyone obeying Him. He has overruled and intervened on earth, and governs all human events, but for now He does so in a way that appears remote and incomplete. Thus, He has never used His absolute power to bring about an end to demonic evil, human rebellion, and

the conqueror and rightful owner, the King of Kings, will plant His feet on land and sea and take possession. This is Jesus the Redeemer who, in chapter 5, took the title deed to the universe from the majesty on high. He is the One who loosed each seal, and now He prepares for the final assault upon hard-hearted earth dwellers who refuse to bow to Him. With a roar like a lion, He will express His power, and with the sound of thunder He will declare the coming judgment. What is amazing is that in verse 7 it says, ... *the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.*

There are two parts to Revelation 10:

- **The Mystery—The Vision of the Son of God** (vv. 1–5): These verses focus on Christ and His power. In verse 1, Jesus reflects God's image; in verse 2, Jesus claims His inheritance; in verse 3, Jesus roars His victory; in verse 4, Jesus shows His grace; and, in verse 5, Jesus reveals the image of God.
- **The Vision of the Word of God** (vv. 6–11): This second part focuses on the Word of God and His plan, and what we are supposed to do with it. In verse 6, Jesus shares the plan of God; in verse 7, Jesus explains the mystery of God; and, in verses 8–11, Jesus shows the way of God—to eat His Word.

As Revelation 10 opens, we stare at the mystery of Jesus. It is on the backdrop of an earth that lies in ecological desolation; the land and sea are ravaged. The benumbed survivors have hastily buried billions of corpses in mass graves. The horrible roar of demon locusts is silent for who knows how much longer. That horrific mounted cavalry from hell—the angels of doom by the hundreds of millions—seem to have ceased their murderous campaign. The sun is getting brighter after the strange darkening that caused such weather disasters; the smoke of the grass and forest fires has started to settle; and some specks of light green anticipate that grass should soon be poking up once again from the scorched earth. The bitter waters of the earth are getting clear again, and no stellar debris has fallen to earth lately. It is halftime—the midpoint of the Tribulation.

So then, what about the mystery? What has been the effect of all this unleashed wrath of God on the cosmos? You cannot explain it any other way but God. It has been systematic, unstoppable, and predicted. Everything that has happened has been written down for 2,000 years in exact detail. God has spoken, and the earth has been faced with God's wrath.

At this point, has the cosmic rebellion ceased? Has Satan bowed his knee and confessed that Jesus is Lord? Has the decimated populace of earth seen ... *the true Light which gives light to every man coming into this world* (John 1:9)? No. That in itself is a mystery to us who know and love the Lord!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, as the end of days fast approaches, we are continually amazed that You would bestow upon us the honor of being able to*

go home to dwell with You forever. Why You would let Your Son redeem us and then go and prepare a place for us is beyond our wildest imagination! As we look into Your Word this week, we pray that Your Spirit would lead us to comprehend the mystery of our Lord Jesus—our wonderful Jesus! May we see Your glory and may Your glory, as the apostle Paul says, transform us more and more into the image of Him whom our souls love, our Lord Jesus. Open our eyes that we may behold wonderful things from the wonders of Jesus. In His precious name we come to You, oh Father. Amen.

MONDAY: See the Mystery

"It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11, emphasis added).

In the New Testament, a mystery is not something eerie or inscrutable, but rather "a truth that was hidden by God in times past and is now revealed to those who are in His family." This mystery is a sacred secret that is unknown to unbelievers, but understood and treasured by the people of God. When you read the New Testament you will see the word "mystery" often.

The Mystery of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:11): The mystery first appears in Matthew 13 where Jesus presented the truth that the majority rejected the good news. This had not been revealed in the Old Testament. God came down in human flesh, walked on the earth, did all kinds of miracles, but most people still did not believe Him. THIS IS A MYSTERY.

The Mystery of Israel's Unbelief (Romans 11:25): Why would those who were the line through which the Messiah would come—the chosen people whom God so wonderfully protected and provided for—reject Him? Have you ever thought of how much food it took to feed them in the wilderness? There were three million people. If they ate normally, it would take a train with 1,300 boxcars, nine and one-half miles long, to carry enough food supplies for each day. But God provided faithfully, every day, by spreading out manna around their tents! Yet, with all that and so much more, they still did not believe!

The Mystery of the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51–52): This is a mystery that God did not reveal until 1 Corinthians 15. That is why so many people who don't understand the Bible don't believe in the Rapture. (It isn't in the Old Testament or the Gospels.)

The Mystery of the Unity of Believers (Ephesians 3:3–6): That all who believe in Christ would be knitted together in Him is a mystery. The mystery of the church as Christ's bride is found nowhere in the Bible until Ephesians 5:24–32. Israel was the wife of Jehovah God (Isaiah 50:1–3; Jeremiah 3:1), but the church is the bride of Jesus Christ.

The Mystery of the Indwelling Christ (Colossians 1:26–27): *The mystery which has been hidden ... now has been revealed to His saints ...: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* The Old Testament saints did not have this privilege.

global injustice and suffering. So chapter 10 opens with Christ coming down to earth, putting one foot on the sea and one foot on the land, and roaring like a lion!

Jesus Christ does not presently receive the worship and honor that is His due as the sovereign King. He has authority that He chooses not to exercise for now, but when He finally establishes His reign, all sin and all suffering will cease. That is our eternal hope for which we pray whenever we repeat the words: *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10).

The Mystery: Why does God continue to wait? Why does He warn, offer, and watch for a few more sinners to repent? **The Answer:** The mystery of Jesus is His amazing love for even those who never seem to stop rejecting Him. So He waits, but now, in Revelation 10, it is time for the seventh trumpet to sound.

TUESDAY: Focus on Jesus

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and 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, emphasis added).

After the opening of the six seals of Revelation 6, the seventh seal initiates the six trumpets of Revelation 8–9. In Revelation 10, John now sees what lies ahead with the seventh trumpet. This trumpet, which sounds in 11:15, holds the longest of the messages of doom.

Do you remember what has happened to set off this chain of terror? The Lamb who was worthy opened the scroll (5:7). What made Him worthy to be the heir of the universe (Hebrews 1:2)? He was the Lamb slain for sin! In Revelation 10, Jesus is now wrestling the dominion of all things back from the thief, the liar, and the murderer—Satan. He is in the process of judging all that the usurper to the throne has caused in the cosmic rebellion.

At this midpoint in the vision, John records the drama of redemption, and we are reintroduced to the hero—our Lord Jesus. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John paints a beautiful picture of Jesus as the almighty Redeemer and absolute victor. Thus Revelation 10 may well be a snapshot capturing the work of Christ and the grandeur of God's plan of redemption.

Jesus reflects God's image: *I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire* (Revelation 10:1 NASB, emphasis added). Jesus was often seen in the Old Testament as a pre-incarnate angel of the Lord. When He appeared it was as a special and mighty angelic messenger from God. In these instances, He would accept and receive worship, which no angel would ever accept, unless it was the usurper himself, Satan. The four descriptions of this mighty angel in verse 1 correspond at each point with previous descriptions of Jesus in Revelation.

This mighty angel comes **clothed with a cloud**—the cloud of God's glory. Revelation 1:7 says, *Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him.* Jesus

was clothed in a cloud like this the last time the apostle John saw Him ascend into heaven in Acts 1:9. And John heard the angels who spoke with the apostles say that Jesus would return “*in like manner*” (Acts 1:11).

In the Old Testament, God manifested His presence by a visible glowing cloud signifying His glory. Israel was led by a pillar of fire and a cloud (Exodus 13:21). They saw the cloud when God’s glory appeared (Exodus 16:10), when the tabernacle was commissioned by God (Exodus 40:38), and over the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:2). In the New Testament, Paul tells us that it was Christ in that cloud who led, watered, and fed them (1 Corinthians 10:1–4). Just as the shekinah (the glory cloud) hovered over the Holy of Holies when God’s presence was there, so what Matthew describes as a “*star*” was probably also another of these Old Testament glory clouds that stood over the manger when God was incarnated. Thus the cloud is always associated with Deity.

Revelation 10:1 says that ***the rainbow was on his head***. The rainbow is a crown. We encountered the rainbow in Revelation 4 as it encircled the throne, reminding us of God’s grace from the time of Noah and the Flood (Genesis 9:13). Ezekiel also saw this rainbow around the throne of God (Ezekiel 1:28). Because of the article used in Revelation 10:1, “*the rainbow*,” this seems to be God’s special crown for His beloved Son, Jesus. It is very interesting that the Hebrew word “bow” is used for both a rainbow and a weapon that shoots arrows. So this rainbow could speak of God’s grace as well as His judgment, which perfectly meet in the person of Jesus (Psalm 85:10). As we have seen so far, the greatest multitude saved in history is coming out of the time of earth’s greatest judgment (Revelation 7:14). Jesus loves and seeks sinners at all times and in every place.

John tells us that ***his face was like the sun*** (Revelation 10:1). In Revelation 1, he also saw the face of Jesus with a countenance shining like the sun (v.16), so this description matches again. Just like at His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) and on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3), Jesus shines as bright as the sun. This fits what Malachi said when he predicted the coming “*Sun of Righteousness*” (4:2).

Here is the fourth description of this mighty angel: ***his feet [are] like pillars of fire***. In Revelation 1:15, the feet of Jesus were like brass glowing from a furnace, which sounds exactly like this mighty angel’s description. This being may well be our Lord Jesus Christ appearing to John as a kingly angel. He often appeared in the Old Testament as “the Angel of the LORD” (Exodus 3:2; Judges 2:4; 6:11–12, 21–22; 2 Samuel 24:16). This was a temporary manifestation for a special purpose, not a permanent incarnation. Whenever Jesus appeared that way, the people would be scared to death and fall on their faces to worship Him. And only Jesus accepts worship!

How is your worship of Jesus these days? Are you remembering to worship first—and then serve Him?

WEDNESDAY: Jesus Claims His Inheritance

He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices (Revelation 10:2–3, emphasis added).

Revelation 1 tells us that the voice of Jesus is powerful. John describes it as *a loud voice, as of a trumpet* (1:10) and *His voice as the sound of many waters* (1:15). In Revelation 5:5b, we learn that “*the Lion of the tribe of Judah ... has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.*” And now in Revelation 10:3 we hear the voice of the conquering Lamb roaring as the Lion of Judah in His victory: “... *When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices.*” Thus we hear the conquering, almighty voice of Jesus declaring His right to possess His possession!

Jesus shows His mighty grace: *Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them”* (Revelation 10:4). This is one of the most beautiful verses in Revelation, but most people don’t understand it. (I had to read this verse about fifty times before I understood what it was saying.)

When the Lion roared in 10:3, *the seven thunders uttered their voices*. That reminds me of a phrase in Psalm 29:3: *the God of glory thunders*. Psalm 29 is speaking of the Flood; the last time God conquered the earth was with water. But when the Lion of the tribe of Judah comes, He will roar like a lion and seven thunders will sound. Since seven means “complete” and thunder means “judgment,” His roar is the sound of complete judgment.

This sound, however, does not refer to unintelligible noise—the thunders are voices. John was about to write down what they said, but God told him, “*Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.*” If God did not want this written down, why did He have John say that he heard something? This is Jesus showing His grace.

Revelation 10:4 is certainly a strange verse without looking at it in light of the whole Bible. John hears and records this event because God wants us to see His loving patience. God, who is not willing that any should perish, halts the annihilation of the human race because there must still be a few more who will be saved. To the end of earth’s history, God is still sprinkling His grace. When the seven thunders explode in the decree of final destruction, God seals it up for a bit longer.

God showed grace and mercy in Noah’s generation by withholding judgment for all those extra days (Genesis 7:4). As He listened to Abraham’s plea to spare Sodom, even if but for a few righteous ones, He was again merciful because God sent the angels to drag Lot out of Sodom and to try to convert his married children. And the earth will be spared once again while God deploys one evangelistic team after another in Revelation 7–14: the 144,000 of chapter 7, the two witnesses of chapter 11, and the angel who goes out in chapter 14.

There may be a similar word in Daniel 12. After the revelation of the coming terrible Tribulation, Daniel is told to seal up the words for three and one-half years as an angel swears by the Almighty (vv. 1–2, 4, 6–7). This may be the same scene John is now seeing. If so, it is a blessed reminder of

God's grace in the midst of judgment. Even as the wrath of God intensifies, He continues to offer salvation in spite of the implacable hardness of human hearts that only seems to increase.

Jesus reveals the image of God: *The angel ... raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer ... (Revelation 10:5–6).*

When the Ancient of Days, God the Father, wants to make Himself known, He always does so through His Son. That is why so many Bible teachers through the ages have seen this angel as Jesus. As John 1:18 says: *No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.* In Revelation 10:5–6, this swearing and holding up of the hand reminds us of what the writer of Hebrews says in 1:1–3: *God, ... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, ... heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, [upholds] all things by the word of His power*

When God made the covenant with mankind, He said that He could not swear by anybody greater than Himself. So God the Son stands there swearing by Himself: *... and swore by Him who lives forever and ever ... (Revelation 10:6a).* The One who created heaven and earth is Jesus Christ.

Jesus lays claim to His rightful possession. As portrayed by this mighty angel, Jesus descends and plants His feet on the land and sea. Whether it is Jesus or just an angel representing Him, this is a picture of laying claim to His possession—an exclusive right of Jesus as the One who purchased it by His blood ... *to reconcile all things to Himself, ... having made peace through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20).*

Jesus is the only One who can reconcile heaven to earth, that which He conquered at the cross. In a special sense, this may show Jesus sharing the right of our redemption, for we are joint heirs with Jesus: *... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together (Romans 8:17).*

We also see this truth in Hebrews 9:15: *... He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.* And in 2 Timothy 2:12, the apostle Paul said, *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

In Revelation we have already seen some wonderful pictures of Jesus as the Son of Man (1:13); the Creator of the universe (4:2, 11); the slain Lamb (5:6); and the Great High Priest (8:3).

In the Old Testament we find Daniel meeting with a heavenly representative. Let's compare these passages to see if we can identify Daniel's visitor.

Daniel 10:5–6, 18	Revelation 1:13–17
Clothed in linen	Clothed with a garment down to the feet
Girded with fine gold	A golden girdle
Body like beryl	Head and hair white as snow

Face as lightning	Face as the sun
Eyes as lamps of fire	Eyes as a flame of fire
Arms and feet like polished brass	Feet like fine brass
Voice like a multitude	Voice as many waters
At the sight, Daniel retained no strength	John fell at His feet as if dead

There can be no doubt about it—Daniel saw the Lord Jesus in His pre-incarnate glory, and John saw Him as the risen and glorified Son. But both of them are the image of the invisible God. And here in Revelation 10:1–6, we have a vision of what may well be Jesus in all His glory coming to take back His earth and, as He lays claim, He gives a loud cry of victory! Oh, won't that be a glorious day!

THURSDAY: Jesus Explains the Mystery

But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets (Revelation 10:7, emphasis added).

In Revelation 10:7, we again see the term *mystery of God*, which is summarized in all the revelation of the Word of God. This mystery is God's waiting and watching while the ravages of sin have run seemingly unhindered throughout all history. As the rebellion of humanity and the blindness of His people continue, God patiently waits for any to return to Christ. However, there is a moment when God is going to say, "Enough! I am now turning My attention on My people—My Israel—and I am going to pour out My wrath on the earth, but I am going to save Israel."

As the representative of both the nation of Israel and all of God's servants, the mystery of God's plan is given to John. Like Daniel who awaited his part, and all the faithful through the ages, it is sweet to know Jesus and yet bitter to see those destroyed who have by the horrors of their sins fitted themselves for destruction. The amazing fact is that among the most hardened hearts (especially in Israel), there will be some who become softened. As Ezekiel and Paul predicted, God will take the stony hearts of the remnant of Israel and turn them to their Messiah (Ezekiel 36:26; Romans 11).

It is tragic that so many of God's servants who have taught His Word have failed to see all that is promised for Israel. It has become popular to spiritualize promises God made to the Jews and attribute them to His church. But the plan of God focuses on Israel. The apex of that plan is the return of Jesus to the earth the second time to save His people as they at last look to Him.

When Jesus comes for His children of faith, He stays in the clouds and we will join Him there. However, we are to return with Him at the climactic moment of history recorded in Revelation 19. The apostle Paul says, *I do not desire, ... that you should be ignorant of this mystery, ... that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and*

He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins" (Romans 11:25–27).

What is God's plan? The apex of His plan is to come back for His people, Israel, and that is what "the little book" in Revelation 10:8–11 is talking about. He is saying that when the fullness of God's plan with the Gentiles is done, He will turn His attention to the hardness of the hearts of His people. This is why chapter 10 is a pivotal chapter. God is not going to delay any longer; He is going to destroy the rebellious of earth and rescue His people Israel.

As we saw in Revelation 8, the momentous time has come for the petition "*Your kingdom come*" to at last occur. So now, with this seventh trumpet, the delay of God is ended and the time for the end is seen in its final three and one-half years. (In Revelation 11:17, we will then see the declaration of the reign of God commencing.)

Are you getting ready for Christ's appearing? What if He were to come today?

FRIDAY: Focus on the Word

*Then the voice ... spoke to me again ..., "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth." So I went to the angel and said to him, "**Give me the little book.**" And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter; but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." Then I ... ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings"* (Revelation 10:8–11, emphasis added).

Revelation 10:8–11 is really the most practical part of the chapter. Jesus shows the way to God—and the way to God is eating His Word. History records an eccentric Ethiopian monarch, Menelik II, who ruled from 1889–1913. This monarch brought Ethiopia out of the dark ages by introducing communication (telephone and telegraph), transportation (railroads), and public education. But he held to a superstition inherited from the ignorance of the past. He believed in a form of self-medication that called for the literal eating of pages from the Bible. Over the years of his reign, it seemed to work quite well. If he felt ill, he ate a page or two. However, at the end of his life, his health was failing in spite of eating one page after another. King Menelik finally ordered the entire book of 1 Kings to be torn out, and he began to eat it page by page. His historians recorded that he died as he was chewing somewhere around the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon.

Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah (15:16) and Ezekiel (2:9–3:4) knew what it was to "eat the Word" before they could share it with others. As Jesus the perfect Word *became flesh* (John 1:14), so we who are His living epistles need to incarnate the written Word in our lives before we can give it to those who need it. Any Christian who merely echoes God's Word, and does not incarnate it by making it a living part of his or her very being, will suffer a great loss of rewards both now and in eternity.

The directions that the angel gave to John in Revelation 10:8–11 should stir us to fulfill our responsibility of assimilating God's Word. He wants us to make it a part of our inner person. It was not enough for John to look at the book or even know its contents and purpose. He had to assimilate it into his inner being. Scripture often compares God's Word to food: (1) bread (Matthew 4:4); (2) milk (1 Peter 2:2); (3) meat (1 Corinthians 3:1–2); (4) wheat (Psalm 81:10); and (5) honey (Psalm 119:103).

Why does God compare His Word to food? God does not force-feed His Word to us. He has provided it, but we are responsible to take in its nourishment. In Revelation 10, John shows that we can never change the effects the Word will have in our lives: sorrow and joy, bitterness and sweetness. God's Word contains sweet promises and assurances, but it also contains bitter warnings and prophecies of judgment. The Christian bears witness of both life and death (2 Corinthians 2:14–17).

The Word of God is a two-edged Sword. His Sword cuts open hearts to the message of salvation, but the gospel also cuts off all who reject Jesus and declares they are facing damnation. Look at what God says in John 3:18: *"He who believes in [Jesus Christ] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*

Unlike the silliness of the Ethiopian monarch, when the apostle John is told to eat the scroll, the imagery is meant for all of God's saints. The Word of God offers such sweetness: ultimate victory on the winning team, God's grace and love, Jesus as our friend and brother, and getting to enjoy the presence of God forever in heaven. But as His Word gets into us, there is also much bitterness. We find out that before we can fully enjoy that bright and glorious future which God has promised, He must reshape our lives from the inside out. The bitter part is not only God's wrath, but also His demand for self-denial: personal change is expected, and we are to take up our cross daily. Suffering and persecution are thus part of our ultimate destiny on earth.

If we eat and assimilate the Word of God, we will be sweetened and then soured until we finally become useful. Like John, through a transformed life we will then be ready to share the message with the world around us. Are you eating? Is the Word of God sweet? Have you felt the bitterness of self-denial? Good! Keep eating—and go in that power to tell the world of Jesus and His great love!

SATURDAY: The Discipline of the Scriptures

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4, emphasis added).

As we have just seen in Revelation 10:8–11, Jesus shows the way to God, and the way to God is eating His Word. I pray that you can joyfully identify with Jeremiah in this verse: *Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart ...*

(Jeremiah 15:16). His passion for God and His Word was consistently, and relentlessly, demonstrated throughout his life as God's prophet.

Wouldn't you like to capture that same passion in your own life? It all starts by disciplining yourself to spend time listening to God speak to you! To help you start cultivating such a time with the Lord, let's look at three areas of spiritual discipline: (1) reading God's Word; (2) memorizing God's Word; and (3) meditating upon God's Word.

Reading God's Word: The Scriptures are the very voice of God, so we must discipline ourselves to *listen* to Him. If we never inconvenience ourselves enough to be disciplined in our Bible reading, there are truths God has for us that will be missed. Our lives then can't help but be empty.

Dr. Harry Ironside (1876–1951), a well-known Bible commentator and great pastor of Moody Memorial Church of Chicago, was a man with little formal education but great power. He read the Bible fourteen times by age fourteen! His mark is still on Chicago—and, indeed, the entire world.

Another outstanding example of a man who practiced the discipline of the Scriptures is Lt. General William K. Harrison (1895–1987). Except for the Congressional Medal of Honor, he received every other decoration for valor. ... General Harrison—a soldier's soldier who led a busy, ultra-kinetic life—was also an amazing man of the Word. When he was a twenty-year-old cadet, he began reading the Old Testament once a year, and the New Testament four times. He continued doing so until the end of his life—having read the Old Testament seventy times and the New Testament 280 times by age ninety!¹

Dr. Ironside and General Harrison both lived out the experience of the psalmist, which tells us the attitude we must have if we are going to have this discipline of Scripture: *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You ... make me wiser than my enemies; ... I have more understanding than all my teachers [and] ... the ancients, because I keep Your precepts*" (Psalm 119:97–100).

Do you see the heartbeat of the man of God? It is God's Word! It only takes fifteen minutes, or three and one-third chapters per day, to read the entire Bible in a year. You can begin to get alone with God when you consider that eating His Word is even more important than your daily meals. You can never have a Christian mind without reading the Scriptures regularly, because you cannot be deeply influenced by that which you do not know.

Memorizing God's Word: Second on the list of how to cultivate a time of getting alone with God is the discipline of *memorizing* the Scriptures. Mrs. Marge Barnhouse said of her famous preacher husband, Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895–1960): "Someone once asked him how long it had taken him to prepare a certain sermon. His answer was 'Thirty years and thirty minutes!' He had immersed himself in the Bible from the time he was fifteen years old, when he memorized the Book of Philippians a verse a day until he knew the entire book by heart, then went on to other passages. He felt it was not enough to learn by rote—it had to be by heart; because you loved and believed it."²

Pioneering missionary to Africa, C. T. Studd (1860–1931), is another of God's great disciplined servants. His life was like his grass hut: there were no doors to shut; he lived with, and

for, his beloved pygmy tribes. How did he prepare to teach as many as 5,000 at a time? How did he get ready to disciple the scores of church leaders who came to sit at the foot of his cot every morning so that he would awake to what he calls in his journal “a sea of black faces and white teeth” waiting for him to open the Book of God to them? He hid God’s Word in his heart beforehand so that he would be ready, at a moment’s notice, to minister to all whom the Lord brought to him.

Are you wasting precious time that would have been better spent listening to God? Will you have any regrets when you look back on your life? Why not begin by memorizing at least one verse a week? That is fifty-two verses in one year!

Meditating upon God’s Word: Meditation is the spiritual discipline of practicing Christ’s words in Matthew 4:4: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* At salvation, we became a soul that thirsts for God and longs to “drink in” His Word; a soul that longs for the “Water of Life” (the continual flow of eternal life) and “drinks in” freely from God in His Word; a soul that thirsts midst the arid, sun-baked, lifeless deserts of life and finds a beautiful, ever-present oasis through communing with God in His Word. This is the secret of God’s great warriors, and a spiritual discipline that we each need to practice.

One outstanding warrior for God is George Mueller (1805–1898), a spiritual giant. His life may be distilled down to these words he wrote in a diary: “It has pleased the Lord to teach me [that] ... the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to the meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved and instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, while meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.”³

Meditating upon the Word brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God, but too few are willing to pay the price. However, each of these great men of the Scriptures—Ironside, Harrison, Barnhouse, Studd, and Mueller—responded with joy to Jesus when they understood, through His Word, that He was saying, “If you will listen to Me, and let Me arrange your life for you, and accompany you through life, I want you to live in My power. I want you to have the boldness that comes from knowing that your life has been authorized by Me. I designed it; I am leading it; I am guiding it; and I am praying for and empowering you to live My life here on earth.” Wow! What an entirely different and powerful way to look at life! That is exactly what He offers if you will but joyfully pursue the discipline of the Scriptures!

Make a choice to live in hope. To truly discover the enduring hope that anchors, you must discipline yourself to daily spend time alone with God in His Word, for *Blessed is the man [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. ... And whatever he does shall prosper* (see Psalm 1:1–3). This is the great necessity of your spiritual life.

E. Stanley Jones once described time spent in the Scriptures as a “time exposure to God.” He used the analogy of his life being like a photographic plate which, when exposed to God, progressively bore the image of God in keeping with the length of exposure. You are called by

God to intentionally, volitionally, and willfully choose to do those things that will exercise, discipline, and direct your life for godliness (2 Peter 1:5–11).

If you will read, study, meditate on, and internalize the Word of God, you will look like Jesus Christ. And that is exactly what God wants!

As you read the words to “Holy Bible, Book Divine,” I pray that you will rejoice in your heart and praise God for giving you such a treasure!

Holy Bible, Book Divine

*Holy Bible, Book divine, Precious treasure, thou art mine:
Mine to tell me whence I came; Mine to teach me what I am.
Mine to chide me When I rove, Mine to show a Savior's love;
Mine thou art to guide and guard; Mine to punish or reward.
Mine to comfort in distress, Suff'ring in this wilderness;
Mine to show, by living faith, We can triumph over death.
Mine to tell of joys to come, And the rebel sinner's doom:
O thou holy Book divine, Precious treasure, thou art mine.*

—John Burton, Sr., 1773–1822

Week 31—Remember God's Plan of the Ages

(Revelation 11)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you remember the plan of the ages!



SUNDAY: The Witness of Jesus

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, ... for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months” (Revelation 11:1–2).

The verses above help us to understand the eleventh chapter of Revelation. Revelation 11:1–2 takes us to a temple in Jerusalem. Immediately we know that this is an earthly scene, and not in heaven, because there are Jews carrying on Old Testament sacrifices—just as Jesus, Daniel, Paul, and now John predicted would happen.

At this midpoint in the Tribulation, the Lord will send a survey crew to the city of Jerusalem to widen the road and clear the roadblocks the Jews laid because of their unbelief. Jesus will then lay claim to His chosen people.

This chapter confirms what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount of Olives—that the temple will be rebuilt and in operation during the Tribulation period. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul wrote about the same thing, and now the apostle John sees it in operation.

The two witnesses (the evangelists) that are introduced are possibly the agents that lead the 144,000 Jews to Jesus in the first three and one-half years. As we learn what is going on, let us not miss the lessons of the four powerful truths in the eleventh chapter of Revelation: (1) God keeps His Word (vv. 1–2); (2) God protects His own (vv. 3–7); (3) God gives endless life (vv. 8–14); and (4) God expects worship (vv. 15–19).

Is the temple the church? Some people believe that verses 1–2 refer to the church, which is one in Christ. But if that were true, why are Jews and Gentiles being segregated? (Ephesians 3 says that the Jews and Gentiles are to be one.) How is it that the worldwide church is localized to Jerusalem? And why are we back to a temple and an altar? Since the middle wall has been broken down, God

says that we no longer need temples and altars with Christ. No, as chapter 11 opens in Jerusalem, this is a yet-future event. Something will happen that would have started a World War had it occurred this week. (By the way, although the church has already been raptured by this point, multitudes will become believers throughout the Tribulation period.)

The book of Daniel, one of the most historically and archaeologically authenticated books of the Old Testament, also says that this is a future event. It is critical to realize that the book of Daniel existed in documented form almost five centuries *before* Christ was born.

While Daniel (originally deported as a teenager into Babylonian captivity) was in the middle of studying the book of Jeremiah, he understood that the seventy years of Jewish exile were almost up, so he began praying that God would forgive the sins of His people. The angel Gabriel, one of the seven angels that stand before God ready to be sent on His missions, interrupted Daniel's prayer saying, "... *At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision ...*" (Daniel 9:23).

The angel Gabriel gave Daniel a four-verse prophecy that is unquestionably the most remarkable prophecy in the entire Bible—Daniel 9:24–27. This prophecy includes the following segments: (1) the scope of the entire prophecy (9:24); (2) the sixty-nine weeks (9:25); (3) the interval between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week (9:26); and (4) the seventieth week (9:27).

To help you better understand Revelation 11, I will cover each of the segments of Daniel's prophecy during this week's devotionals. I hope that you are looking forward to studying this remarkable prophecy!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, You who put Your seal of ownership on the temple by measuring it; You who raised up Your special witnesses and sent them throughout the earth with amazing powers; You, the great God who is always in control and never in a hurry, we bow before You. By Your grace and through Your Spirit empower us to understand this most critical chapter in Your Word—that the fullness of all that You have promised You will bring to pass. And that You will bring to pass Your powerful Word in our personal lives as well. May Your will be done in us as it is in heaven, and soon to be done on earth. I pray that death would be a sobering lesson for all of us to live our lives in such a way that we are ready to go home to You at any moment. May we not be fearful and worried, but rather confident and triumphant when that hour comes. Father, speak to us through Your Word. We thank You for the privilege of looking into it again. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Daniel's Prophecy Is an End-of-Days Road Map

"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in

everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy"
(Daniel 9:24, emphasis added).

God's prophetic Word in Daniel 9 is directed at the future of Israel—not the church. In God's Word, more than 75 percent of all prophecies (fulfilled and not yet fulfilled) are about the future of Israel. His Word always has and always will focus on Israel. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul reminded the church of this when he clearly warned them to not forget that they are grafted into the tree, which is Israel (Romans 11:11–36).

Segment One—The Scope of the Entire Prophecy: God worked with the Jews 2,200 years before the church and is going to work with them 1,000 years after the church. In our little period of time, 2,000 years, we are important, but we are not all there is. Israel is critically important. The church is blended together with them now; we are grafted in, but God is going to come and deal with them again. We should therefore diligently lead people to Christ, because as soon as the last one to be saved is saved, we will be raptured out of this planet.

Now let us look at the scope of the whole period. At the beginning of today's devotional, we read Daniel 9:24 in which God said some specific things about the Jews. The idiom of "a week of years" was common in Israel as a "sabbath for the land." You can read about this in Leviticus 25–26 and Deuteronomy 15. These passages talk about a sabbath for the land—about *heptads*, or periods of seven years; the land was to lie fallow every seventh year. It was their failure to obey these and other laws that led to God's sending them into captivity under the Babylonians (2 Chronicles 36). They were to work for six years and take the seventh year off. After forty-eight years, the forty-ninth was the sabbath year—and the fiftieth year was the Jubilee year. It was a wonderful system. God said that they needed that rest and renewal ... *to anoint the Most Holy* (Daniel 9:24). *And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years* (2 Chronicles 36:20–21).

Note that Daniel 9:24 is not directed to the church but focuses upon "... your people [Israel] and ... your holy city [Jerusalem]." The scope of this prophecy includes a broad list of things that clearly are yet to be completed.

Segment Two—The First Sixty-Nine Weeks: A very specific prediction occurs:

... From the going forth of the command to restore and to build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street [open square] shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off [the Crucifixion], but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy [by the Romans, A.D. 70] the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be

one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate” [the Antichrist, 2 Thessalonians 3] (Daniel 9:25–27).

This passage encapsulates all of biblical prophecy. It also includes a mathematical prophecy. The Jewish (and Babylonian) calendars used a 360-day year (Genesis 7:24); sixty-nine weeks of 360-day years totals 173,880 days. In effect, the angel Gabriel told Daniel that the interval between the command to rebuild Jerusalem until the presentation of the Messiah as King would be 173,880 days. The “Messiah the Prince” in the *King James* translation is actually the “Meschiach Nagid”—“The Messiah the King.” (Nagid is first used of King Saul.)

This is a prophetic bull’s eye: the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem was given by Artaxerxes Longimanus on March 14, 445 B.C.¹ (The emphasis on *the street* and *the wall* in Daniel 9:25 was to avoid confusion with other earlier mandates confined to rebuilding the temple.)

When did the Messiah present himself as King? During the ministry of Jesus Christ there were several occasions in which the people attempted to promote Him as their king, but He carefully avoided it because His time had not yet come (John 6:15).

Then one day Christ meticulously arranged His timely triumphant entry. When He rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey, He deliberately fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy (483 years earlier) that the Messiah would present himself as King in just that way: “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation. Lowly and riding on a donkey*” (Zechariah 9:9).

The crowds were thought to be mad when they cried out: “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*” (Luke 19:38). Some of the Pharisees in the multitude wanted Jesus to rebuke the people because they felt that the overzealous crowd was blaspheming by proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, the King (Luke 19:39). However, Jesus did not rebuke the crowd, He endorsed their praise: “*I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out*” (Luke 19:40). This is the only occasion that Jesus presented Himself as King. It occurred on April 6, A.D. 32.

The divine precision of prophecy is indisputable. When we examine the period between March 14, 445 B.C. and April 6, A.D. 32, and correct for leap years, we discover that it is 173,880 days exactly—to the very day! How could Daniel have known this in advance? How could anyone have contrived to have this detailed prediction documented over three centuries in advance? But there is even more!

Segment Three—The Interval Between the Sixty-Ninth and Seventieth Week: There appears to be a gap between the sixty-ninth week (v. 25) and the seventieth week (v. 27). Look again at Daniel 9:26: “*And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.*”

The sixty-two weeks follow the initial seven, so verse 26 deals with events after the sixtieth week, but before the seventieth. These events include the Messiah being killed and the city and sanctuary being destroyed.

As Jesus approached the city on the donkey, He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem: "... *Your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround ... and level you ... to the ground; and they will not leave ... one stone upon another because you did not know the time of your visitation*" (Luke 19:43–44).

The Messiah was, of course, executed at the Crucifixion—"but not for Himself." Christ presented Himself, but they did not accept Him, so the Romans killed Him; He was cut off. Thirty-eight years later, in A.D. 70, the Roman legions under Titus Vespasian leveled the city of Jerusalem, precisely as Daniel and Jesus had predicted. Both the city and sanctuary were destroyed. In fact, as one carefully examines Jesus' specific words—"because you did not know the time of your visitation"—it appears that He held the people accountable to know this astonishing prophecy in Daniel 9.

Even as we remember that moment when Christ saw the future desolation of Israel, we also remember that He *wept*. Christ's compassion, even in the face of well-deserved punishment, should move our hearts. He is so aware of our weaknesses; He knows we are dust. He ever lives to intercede for us. And today Jesus wants to be invited to walk through this day, hand in hand with us—guiding us, protecting us, and receiving from us our adoration and love!

TUESDAY: The End of Days Described

"Then he [the Antichrist] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week ..." (Daniel 9:27, emphasis added).

In yesterday's devotional we saw that Daniel 9:24 says that seven weeks are determined; we have found sixty-nine of them. Daniel 9:27 now references the remaining "one week," or seven-year period yet to be fulfilled, which is the most documented period in the entire Bible. Revelation 6–19 is essentially a detailing of that climactic seventieth week. That is why we say the Tribulation is seven years—there is one week of years still left to be fulfilled.

Segment Four—The Seventieth Week: The interval between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week continues at the present time, but it is increasingly apparent that it may soon be over. The more one is familiar with the numerous climactic themes of end-times prophecy, the more it seems that Daniel's seventieth week is on our horizon. Have you done your homework? Are you and your family prepared?²

Christ said, "... When you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ..., then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15–16). And Paul tells us: ... *That Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is*

called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

This temple they spoke of *is* coming; that is why Jerusalem is such a hot piece of real estate to God and to Satan. Scholars of prophecy do not agree on all the details of future events, but the next two paragraphs are a fair representation of what many prophetic scholars believe concerning the order of events.

First, the church will be raptured (1 Corinthians 15:51–58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18), which can occur at any time. Once the true church is gone, the leader of the ten European nations will make a seven-year agreement with Israel (Daniel 9:26–27). After three and one-half years, he will break that agreement (Daniel 9:27). The Antichrist will subsequently begin to control the world and force all people to worship and obey him. At this time God will send Great Tribulation upon the earth (Matthew 24:21). The Antichrist will then set up his image in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4; Revelation 13).

Next in the order of events is that the nations will gather at Armageddon to fight both the Antichrist and Israel. (Antichrist will aid Israel at first, but later turn against them.) However, as they all see the sign of Christ's coming, everyone will unite together to fight against Him (Zechariah 12; Revelation 13:13–14; 19:11ff). But Jesus will gloriously return to the earth, defeat His enemies, be received by the Jews, and establish His kingdom (Revelation 19:11ff; Zechariah 12:7–13:1). He will then reign on earth for 1,000 years, which is the period known as the Millennium (Revelation 20:1–5).

What happens to allow this temple to be put in place and not destroy the earth? Ezekiel 37–39 may have the clue. When Ezekiel wrote, he was a captive in exile. Israel was defeated, occupied, and no longer a nation. From the sixth century B.C. until 1948, there has never been a nation called Israel. So this passage *must* be future by every way of consideration. This event may even happen *before* the Tribulation because at the midpoint of the Tribulation the temple is fully functional, and the Antichrist desecrates it. Things will fall apart so greatly in the Tribulation that I don't think there will be much building going on during that time, so the temple will probably be built before the Tribulation starts—or very soon after it begins.

Chapters 37–39 of Ezekiel are so important to God that He repeats Himself eight times. Let's start with Ezekiel 37, which is all about the regathering of Israel, and Israel as the "valley of dry bones." In verses 1–6, Israel is going to be regathered, and the dry bones are going to come home. In 37:9 He says, "... Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." The Jews came back to Israel from every corner of the earth!

In 37:12 we read: "*Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel."*" What graves are being referred to? It could be that it is all of those graves including Dachau, Treblinka, Auschwitz, and other concentration camps all around Eastern Europe. I have been to many of these places, and it made me grieve and weep to see what the Jews went through!

In 37:13 He opens the graves: "*Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.*"

The European Jews (which were the vast majority of all the Jewish population) were so close to extinction that God intervened. The Germans were actually smarter and better soldiers. They had better technology and had the upper hand, but they made some key mistakes. They went to Russia instead of the oil fields in Romania. Hitler could have won. But God says, "You can be the smartest and have the biggest army, but you are not going to win because I am going to let everybody know that I am the Lord!"

Now look at 37:14: "*I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,' says the LORD."*"

Against the entire United Nations, the whole assembled world, and everyone's better judgment—Israel was allowed to have a land on May 1, 1948—and that was a miracle. We should be really amazed that Israel even exists today. But all this is so we will know that the Lord is God!

As we reflect on how God has kept His Word for Israel, it should thrill us to know that the very same awesome power of an omnipotent God is at work each day in us. Christ's invitation to abide in and live through us (John 15) is the key to living fruitfully. I encourage you to pause right now and renew Paul's prayer and make it your own: "... Nevertheless as I live—it becomes less of me and more of Christ who lives in and through me ..." [author's own translation] (Galatians 2:20).

WEDNESDAY: Russia and the End of Days

"... *Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, ... and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them ...; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you"*"' (Ezekiel 38:3–6, emphasis added).

In the above passage, Israel is in the land and something is about to happen. Have you ever wondered whether the names in verses 3–6 are connected with Russia? To find a possible answer, one must first identify the areas against which Ezekiel prophesied, and then determine the countries that occupy those land areas today. Ezekiel's prophecy does not point to Russia merely because the words sound similar. Neither should one identify "Meshech" with Moscow or "Tubal" with Tobolsk. Ezekiel had historical rather than modern-day places in mind, so these areas must be located according to Ezekiel's time. This represents the entire Arab confederacy and some great power in the far north. Russia, with the largest landmass on the planet, is the only power that fits. As far back as the Scythians, they have historically been an enemy of Israel.

However, while one must avoid dogmatic assertions, these reasons suggest including Russia within Ezekiel's prophecy. Some of the geographic places named by Ezekiel may have been located in what is now Russia. The armies are said to come "*from the far north*" (Ezekiel 38:6, 15;

39:2). This probably includes the land bridge between the Black and Caspian Seas, now part of Russia. Ezekiel spoke of a coalition of several nations, many of which are today aligned with or under the influence of Russia. These include Iran (Persia), Sudan and northern Ethiopia (Cush), Libya (Put), and Turkey (Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Beth Togarmah). All these nations, possibly led by Russia, will unite to attack Israel (see Ezekiel 38:2–3, 5–6).

Ezekiel was describing a battle that will involve Israel's remotest neighbors. "They will sense their opportunity to attack when Israel feels secure under the false protection of her covenant with the Antichrist sometime at the beginning of the seven-year period. The nations involved in the attack will likely include Russia, Turkey, Iran, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Libya. Ezekiel first pictured the invasion by Gog and his allies (38:1–16), and then described their judgment (38:17–39:29)."³

Every time there is a big battle in the Bible, God fights for Israel. Gideon is a classic example of this: with torches, pitchers, horns, and 300 men—180,000 soldiers were routed because God caused the soldiers to turn their swords on each other! And He will display His sovereign intervention again in Ezekiel 38:19–23 by using natural, and possibly even supernatural, means to protect Israel. In His "*jealousy and in the fire of [His] wrath*" He will send "*a great earthquake in the land of Israel*," and "*call for a sword against Gog*" so that "*every man's sword will be against his brother*." Furthermore, He will judge them "*with pestilence and bloodshed ... and will rain down ... great hailstones, fire, and brimstone*" (which is a supernatural event). His ultimate purpose is to "*magnify*" Himself so that they shall know that He is the Lord!

In verses 19–23, a coalition of armies is moving toward Israel from the north (all of Israel's invaders usually came from the north—the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians). When they get to Israel there is going to be such a severe and devastating earthquake that it will be felt all over the planet.

The word "*pestilence*" in verse 22 is interesting. Do you remember the "*beasties*" we saw in Revelation 6? The beasts of the earth are more than lions, tigers, and bears; there are also little beasts of the earth. In laboratories all over the world, terrorists and governments are making anthrax, botulism, typhoid, and all kinds of other lethal organisms.

Although soldiers today don't carry swords, God says that their swords turn on themselves. A normal army today carries enough munitions to destroy the entire army. God turns these weapons against their owners supernaturally. (See also Ezekiel 39:1–9.) It is interesting that God Himself will give Israel the victory even though they could use their scores of nuclear weapons. (Israel's stockpile of nuclear weapons is probably what has kept the Arabs at bay.)

When writing in 600 B.C. about this warfare, Ezekiel referred to weapons such as shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, and javelins and spears. Would he have been able to describe modern warfare? No, Ezekiel did not have the necessary vocabulary. But this doesn't mean the armies are going to revert back to chariots and weapons made of wood: "*They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them*," says the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 39:10).

The useable length of life for atomic material is seven years. It is possible that their atomic power plants will have enough plutonium out of those weapons to power the whole nation of Israel for seven years. (Steel or titanium can't be burned.)

How is this possible? They will be following the proper protocol for biological or atomic warfare. If there is an outbreak of atomic warfare the area would have to be isolated. Ezekiel 39:12–16 tells us that "*For seven months the house of Israel will be ... burying them ... and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified,*" says the Lord GOD. ... "*At the end of seven months they will ... pass through the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog. The name of the city will also be Hamonah. Thus they shall cleanse the land.*"

The valley of Hamon Gog is southeast of the Dead Sea, down wind from Israel, on the Arab side. Crews will be going throughout the land to decontaminate the battle area. Even though it would be much easier to dig a big pit where the battle took place and simply push the bodies and weapons into it, they won't want to contaminate the headwaters of the Jordan River. Therefore, all the bodies and weapons will be removed to Hamon Gog.

Now look at 39:17: "*And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field ...'*" God will send 60 percent of carnivorous scavenger birds to fly their migration routes over Israel every year, and there will be a big feast.

Ezekiel 39:22—"So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day forward"—is what I think will embolden them to say: "God did this!" Though there is no conversion to Christ, they will be impressed to build the temple once the militant Muslims and possibly the Russians are destroyed: "... *Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD*" (Ezekiel 39:28–29).

In conclusion, it is possible that a pretribulation invasion of Israel will spur them on to build the temple with no opposition. But if not, then it will certainly come about because of the false promises of the Antichrist.

Since we don't know when this may occur, we need to keep that same attitude the early church lived—"Perhaps today ..." If Jesus did come today, what do you wish He would find you doing? That is what you should seek to do. And what would you wish to *not* have Him find you doing? That is what you should avoid. Such choices make life so simple. There are only two options each day: please Jesus, who may come at any moment, or please ourselves, which is so empty.

THURSDAY: The Future Temple in Jerusalem

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there" (Revelation 11:1, emphasis added).

John now begins to weave together one of the longest Old Testament prophecies about Israel's future. Ezekiel devoted nine long chapters to a prophetic description of a massive temple built in Jerusalem. In Revelation 11, John picks up with God surveying for a temple in Jerusalem.

Almost all prophetic writers place the temple of Ezekiel in the millennial times, but the proximity of Ezekiel chapter 39 to chapter 40 is very interesting. The biggest section in which the Bible discusses a future temple is right after this invasion, which reminds us of God's long-term plans for Jerusalem. Therefore, whatever mankind does to oppose Israel only serves to accomplish God's ultimate purposes for them.

In Revelation 11:1, "measuring" speaks of someone setting an area aside to claim it for one's own self. This could be for destruction, preparation for building, restoration, or something else. Now look at the second verse: "*But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth*" (Revelation 11:2–3).

There were four courts in the temple—each opening into the other until the Holy of Holies was reached. These courts were:

- 1. The Courtyard of the Gentiles:** This was the only place non-Jews could enter without the penalty of death for violation. There was a fence with posted warnings on tablets that spoke of the death penalty for crossing over into the next court by any Gentile.
- 2. The Courtyard of the Women:** This was next, and it was the extent of a woman's access to the temple in those days.
- 3. The Courtyard of the Israelites:** This was the third courtyard, and it marked the limit of where non-priestly men could enter.
- 4. The Courtyard of the Priests:** This was the final area. In this area were the laver, the brass altar of the burnt offering, and the Holy Place. In the temple proper were the two chambers: the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

Old Testament worship centered first on the tabernacle, and later the temple; that divinely designed liturgy was carried on for 1,500 nearly unbroken years, except when Israel sometimes lapsed into apostasy. The Israelites followed the instructions God gave Moses when he was on Mt. Sinai. The epicenter of that worship was the Holy Place. In the front half of it stood the altar of incense, the golden lampstand, and the table of showbread. A curtain divided the room; this curtain was actually a finely woven rug four inches thick, sixty feet high and forty feet wide. It was massive and towering; no natural light ever penetrated its dark depths. Even the light of the ever-burning lampstand never reached behind the veil.

In better times, the shekinah glory of the presence of God made the Holiest of Holies behind the veil brighter than noonday. In all Israel's history, probably no more than fifty men had ever

gone into the Holy of Holies. Even David, Daniel, and Jeremiah never went in. Only the High Priest could enter, and then only once a year.

Inside that room was a gold-covered box containing the stone tablets of the Law, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that had budded. Above the ark of the covenant stood two golden cherubim with wings shielding the mercy seat—their faces forever gazing downward, focusing upon the blood to be offered.

When the day came for the High Priest to pass behind that veil, he was garbed carefully in the God-directed robes and priestly garments. He wore bells on the hem of his garment to let the other priests know he was still alive as he was inside. With trembling hands cradling a basin of blood, veiled by a cloud of smoking incense burning in a pot he carried, the High Priest would enter. After sprinkling the blood on that mercy seat on behalf of all the people of God, he hastened out. Why? The only purpose of the veil was to keep people out of the holy presence of God. God was saying: "I AM HOLY. YOU ARE NOT. STAY OUT!"

In Revelation, God's panorama of the end of days has a curious reference to the period of time we call the Tribulation. The Tribulation, and portions of it, are called by many different names such as a "week," "forty-two months," "one thousand two hundred and sixty days," and "*a time, times and a half*." All these refer to the seventieth week of Daniel 9—a week of years, or seven years. The forty-two months, 1,260 days, and "*a time, times and a half*" are all references to half of these seven years. But as often happens in prophetic portions of the Scriptures, there are near and far fulfillments.

In Jewish history, a three and one-half year time period is not only a time measurement for the future, but it is also a memory of an event that deeply touched the Jews of the intertestamental period. For three and one-half years, the rebellion against the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes' desecration of the temple was waged. The brave soldiers of Judas Maccabaeus fought from June 168 B.C. until December 165 B.C. and, through some amazing victories, drove out the pagan intrusion into the worship of the Lord. Many martyrs fell during this time that was described prophetically four hundred years before it took place (Daniel 7–12).

Regardless of whether God is pouring out great blessings upon His people, or deserved judgment, He wants us to *know* that He is the Lord—and deserves worship. Is that your heart toward Him today?

FRIDAY: God Stakes His Name on Israel

"At the same time," says the LORD, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people." Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him rest" (Jeremiah 31:1–2).

God has staked His name on one nation—Israel. No city on planet Earth has the history of God's city—Jerusalem! For over 4,000 years Jerusalem has been the city of God. Look with me at this timeline of God's association with Jerusalem.

Well over 4,000 years ago, Jerusalem was the city of Melchizadek (a type of Christ [see Genesis 14]) and Abraham's offering of Isaac; over 3,000 years ago Jerusalem was the city of David, the city of Solomon, and of God's personally designed temple. God calls it "My city" (Hosea 5:15). Two thousand years ago Jerusalem was the place of Christ's Crucifixion—now a place sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In A.D. 70 the temple (built by Herod) was destroyed. The first temple (Solomon's) was destroyed in 586 B.C. The second temple was built by Zerubbabel, and then greatly enlarged and embellished for over 40 years by Herod. In A.D. 685–691 the Dome of the Rock was built over the same area, and in A.D. 1520–1566 Suleiman the Magnificent added the present walls. Today this city of less than a square mile is the focus of most of the nations of the world for one reason: God has chosen Jerusalem to be the focal point for His plan for the end of the world!

God keeps His Word. Now look at Revelation 11:1–2 again where God says that there will be another temple: "*Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.*"

Daniel also said that there would be another temple (9:27 and 12:11), as did Christ in Matthew 24:15–16 and Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:4. Thus, no matter how bleak Israel's situation may become in our fast-darkening world, or how impossible it may seem that they can even survive as a nation, God is in control working out His plan. He has a building project, and all that He has written and promised will come to pass.

God protects His own—to the finish: "*And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner*" (Revelation 11:3–5).

God has always had His witnesses: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Job, Moses, Samuel, and so on. But who are the two witnesses in verse 3? There are several possibilities. Perhaps they are Joshua and Zerubbabel, as mentioned in Zechariah 3–4. Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:9–11) are possibilities because neither saw death, and both were fearless prophets during times of apostasy (Jude 14–15).

Moses and Elijah are the most likely choice, however, because of their presence on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17); position in God's plan (head of the Law and head of the Prophets); and their God-given power in ministry (Moses' plagues in Egypt and Elijah's fire and drought). Note verse 6: *These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy [Elijah]; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues [Moses], as often as they desire* (Revelation 11:6).

It is intriguing to read that the two at the tomb of Jesus (Luke 24:4, 7) and the two at the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9–11) were called "men," and not angels. Malachi 3:3 and 4:5–6 is a very strong prophecy of Elijah's coming. It is very possible that Elijah and Moses witnessed for Christ at the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. The timing of the ministries of the two witnesses and the 144,000 evangelists is not entirely clear. But if the two witnesses

are in the first half of the Tribulation, then the 144,000 could very well be saved and called into duty by the ministry of these particular witnesses.

Now, the first reference to *the beast* (which appears thirty-six times in the book) is in Revelation 11:7: *When they [the two witnesses] finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.*

While it is true that God protects His own, the two witnesses will be destroyed by the Antichrist. How can that be explained? God's protection does not preclude disease, death, and martyrdom. However, He protects us from doing anything less than serving Him and fulfilling His will—and His will just might happen to be disease, death, and martyrdom. We don't know what His plan is. We are simply to serve Him by life or death, and trust that He will grant protection for as long as is needed for us to finish His plan.

Jacob followed his Shepherd: *And he blessed Joseph, and said: "... The God who has fed me ... to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth"* (Genesis 48:15–16).

David finished God's purposes for his life: *"When David had served God's purpose ..., he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed"* (Acts 13:36 NIV).

Paul finished the race course God laid out for him: *I have fought the good fight, ... finished the race, ... kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... will give to me on that Day, and ... to all who have loved His appearing* (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

Jesus confidently cried out in victory: *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit* (John 19:30).

God gives endless life: *And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then [all] ... will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. [All] ... will rejoice over them ... because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, ... and great fear fell on those who saw them. ... And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and ... seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly* (Revelation 11:8–14 NIV).

Imagine the world's immense shock when they see the two witnesses alive again! Raising the dead is certainly nothing new for our omnipotent God—the One ... who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did ... (Romans 4:17). He gives this same wonderful promise to us: ... *He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you* (Romans 8:11 NIV). Hallelujah!

There will be a quake at the end of each of the series of judgments: the sixth seal, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh bowl. This huge earthquake will kill thousands of people and thereby bring terror to those yet alive. Some will become so afraid that they give glory to the God of heaven, which may be an indication of the salvation of a Jewish remnant.

We can glean three practical lessons from today's devotional: (1) God keeps His Word; (2) God protects His own; and (3) God gives endless life. Do you trust Him? Do you rest in the confident hope that He will be with you to the finish of the race He's laid out for you? Do you communicate that hope to those around you?

SATURDAY: God Expects Worship

Then 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!" And the twenty-four elders ... worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, he One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name ..., and should destroy those who destroy the earth." Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail (Revelation 11:15–19, emphasis added).

Heaven is a worship-focused place where God rules and reigns (vv. 15–16). Are you experiencing heaven as you worship Him? Worship flows out of the wonders of God's revelation of Himself: He is eternal in character (v. 17a), awesome in power (v. 17b), righteous in judgment (v. 18), and mighty in faithfulness (v. 19)!

The activity in heaven consists almost entirely of worship (Revelation 4; 5; 7:9–12), for there will be no more hunger, thirst, or scorching heat (Revelation 7:16). God will wipe all tears away (Revelation 7:17; 21:4). Death, mourning, and pain will vanish because "*the former things have passed away*" (Revelation 21:4). Heaven is a wonderfully protected place; all evil is excluded: *There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie ...* (Revelation 21:27). The sheer freedom from fallen experience is pictured by city gates that "*shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)*" (Revelation 21:25). Oh, how I hope that your heart is filled to overflowing with adoration for the God who loves you so—the One with whom you will dwell *eternally!*

People of faith will *desire a better, that is, a heavenly country—for the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Hebrews 11:16; Romans 8:18)! God expects worship—do you wholeheartedly adore Him?

Make a choice to live in hope. What is your response to God's plan of the ages? If you want to have living hope for the end of days, reflect upon the glorious afterlife ahead.

Week 32—Keep Christ's Perspective

(Revelation 12)

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



SUNDAY: Space Invaders

Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith ... (1 Peter 5:8–9, emphasis added).

Above the softness of our blue-green planet there are hostile forces poised! They range across space lurking and flying about at their master's bidding. They are former angels—Satan the dragon's army. They are deadly, vile, malignant, and very intelligent (in Greek, "demon" means "intelligence").

These aliens to our planet are highly skilled, incredibly powerful, and usually invisible warriors. Demons can hear us talk, pass through walls, fly through space, inhabit human and animal bodies, alter human behavior, and afflict humans with disease, anguish, and turmoil. These extra-terrestrial beings can take on various forms that look human, look powerful, and look fearsome. They are watching over the realm of the serpent and his seed. You see, we saints of God are at war.

There is an intense conflict going on that most of us have not fully comprehended. Swirling around us, the unseen beings of the spirit world are locked in mortal combat. Behind the scenes in every boardroom, political planning session, military strategy session, classroom, worship service, and everywhere else—these unseen spirits watch, listen, and whisper their lies. It is the battle for the planet Earth that rages! The god of this world has dispatched his demon warriors with one target: blind the minds of earth's inhabitants until they cannot see and thus will not follow God!

Revelation 12 is one of the more difficult chapters of the Bible because it is so full of pictures and symbols. In no other place in the Word of God is the conflict of the ages more clearly laid out than

in Revelation 11:19–12:17 where He names the key players in the battle for planet Earth. And Revelation 12 is His battle plan!

Revelation 11:19–12:7 is divided into three powerful insights for our lives today:

- 1. We have victory in Jesus because God is faithful** (11:19–12:6). That is why the passage starts with the temple and the ark of the covenant scene. Faithfulness is one of the attributes of God.
- 2. We have victory in Jesus because Satan is vanquished** (12:7–9). God limits everything about Satan. Many of us tremble before Satan. But when Martin Luther wrote his great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” he had the right perspective: “We tremble not for him for lo his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him.”
- 3. We have victory in Jesus because saints suffer** (12:10–17). Victory comes through our suffering. Peter tells us in his first epistle that suffering refines us, so we are called to go through various trials. David tells us in the Old Testament that suffering is that which causes us to experience afresh the life-giving and renewing power of God through His Word.

Are you getting the picture that you have victory in Jesus—no matter what is going on in your life? I encourage you to grab hold of that truth and press on with enduring hope for the help that is yours through faith!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord, thank You that we can come before Your Word knowing that we have the precious privilege of having the greatest Bible teacher of all time living within us—the author. By Your grace and through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the anointing of Your Holy Spirit. He who dwells within us teaches us Your Word. As we meet with You, we pray that Your precious Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts to Your Word. As we study and ponder and consider it, gently illumine and quiet our hearts to the truth of the response that You wish from us. In this conflict of the ages, in the swirling celestial battlefield that is amassed around Your children, we are the focal point of the dragon who seeks to disarm us from being able to walk in the power of Your Spirit through Your Word. I pray that we would say yes to You, oh God. May we resist the devil so he will flee from us, and may we see many turn from darkness to light around us. May our words of witness be effectual as Your Spirit wings into the heart of each one we speak to. I pray that we will learn about the victory of Jesus and be confident that we are more than conquerors through Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Victory in Jesus

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail (Revelation 11:19, emphasis added).

We have victory in Jesus because God is faithful. Think about this for a moment: *What makes the earth so important that God and Satan are both so interested in this planet?* The answer is simple: God has staked His very name on a person—Jesus Christ; on an event—the cross of Calvary; and on a people—the Jews. God has said that His name is incarnated in Jesus Christ; His power is revealed through the cross; and His plan is centered on the Jews. Those converge on this planet because the center of redemptive history surrounds the earth.

Two lines run through the history of mankind in every event, and they conclude in the culmination of history. To understand the conflict of the ages we need to look at the beginning of Genesis where we are introduced to the two combatants: the line of Christ and the line of Antichrist—the line of the woman's Seed and that of the serpent. In Genesis 3:15 God declared to Satan: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your [the serpent's] seed and her Seed [Jesus Christ]; he [Jesus] shall bruise [crush] your head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His [Jesus'] heel"* (Genesis 3:15).

Satan bruised Christ's heel on the cross, but Jesus crushed the serpent's head. The writer of Hebrews says: ... *Through death He ... destroy[ed] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil* ... (Hebrews 2:14). Satan is destroyed—Jesus crushed the serpent!

The serpent's seed has constantly been against the woman. What is meant by that? The whole Bible can be put into perspective with these two statements: (1) The line of Christ begins with Adam, passes via Golgotha, and leads to the heavenly Jerusalem; and (2) The line of Antichrist begins with Cain, passes via Babel, and leads to the lake of fire. There are only two families—God's and Satan's; two destinies—heaven and hell; and two choices—repent or reject. You either belong to one family or the other. You choose your own eternal destiny.

Two programs are at work in the world: God's program of salvation and Satan's program of sin, which is called "the mystery of iniquity" in the Bible. God has a timetable for His program, and nothing Satan does can change that timetable. Just as there was a *fullness of the time* for the coming of Christ (Galatians 4:4), so there is a *fullness of the time* for the appearance of the Antichrist. Nothing will be off schedule. Once the restraining ministry of the Spirit of God has ended, the next event can take place.

These chapters are easier to understand when you look at them up close and then step back in order to see the entire picture. We will start with Revelation 11:19 because the victory of Jesus is based on God's faithfulness.

Although there is a temple in heaven, there won't be one in eternity because God Himself will be the temple (Revelation 21). There is a pattern that is a picture of earthly worship in heavenly places. Moses modeled the tabernacle and Solomon modeled the temple after it. The ark of

the covenant will be seen in heaven because God wants us to realize how important it is. What is so important about the ark? And why is the temple opened so that through John we can see that it is there? The ark is a symbol of God's abiding presence and promises. Do you remember its contents?

The Two Stone Tablets of the Law: On two stone tablets, with His own finger, God wrote the law that He wanted man to follow—the law declaring that our God is unceasingly holy in the demands of His character. Since the law is so important to God, it should also be important to us. Not that we fulfill it to become righteous, but that the law causes us to realize that God is holy. This is why the law is a schoolmaster that leads us to Christ. Through the law, we realize that we are unable to be as holy as God is, or wants us to be. When we are defeated by sin, we fall before Him and cry out: “We *can't* be holy!” Then God responds: “You can have the righteousness of My Son, Jesus Christ. You can receive the imputed, infused righteousness of Christ.”

Aaron's Rod That Budded: This rod reminds us that only God gives eternal life through His Son, for Jesus said ... *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live”* (John 11:25). In contrast, Satan only gives death and destruction. Jesus said, *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10).

The Pot of Manna: This pot was kept as a picture of Jesus Christ who came as the Bread of Life. On earth, this manna turned to worms if it was kept more than a day, except on the Sabbath weekend. The lesson for us is that we need to gather the Bread of Life daily by reading the Bible. Christ is the only One who can satisfy the hunger of our souls. Just as the manna was good if it was ingested, so Christ is transforming to our lives if we personally receive Him. No one can eat or drink *for* us. Salvation is compared to the bread and water of life because we have to personally partake to have our hunger and thirst satisfied.

When God describes the heavenly pattern, it starts at the ark of His covenant and moves outward. Similarly, the Lord starts in the hearts of those who respond to Him and then He begins the miracle of changing them from the inside out. Salvation is truly of God, and not by self-effort: *“... Salvation is of the LORD”* (Jonah 2:9).

The tragic error of modern ecumenical evangelism is its reluctance to define who God really is in an effort to not offend other religions and cults. It offends God, though, and ecumenicalism is Satan's church: *“... There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

Remembering what God revealed about Himself by what He called His ark will help us to understand Revelation 12:

- **Ark of the Covenant** (Numbers 10:33): This name spoke of God's **faithfulness**. He makes covenants and does not break them.
- **Ark of the Testimony** (Exodus 25:22): This name spoke of God's **holiness**. Because we are lost, God sent His Son to show us *“the Way”* of safety. In the Old Testament,

the pictures of the sacrifices testified of Jesus; in the New Testament “*the Way*” was shown through the receiving of the finished work of Christ.

- **Ark of God** (1 Samuel 3:3): This name spoke of God’s **uniqueness**; there is no other God, nor any other way to Him but His way.

The ark also spoke of God’s mightiness because it was the ark of God’s strength, which associated it with God’s power and miracles (Psalm 132:8). In addition, the ark spoke of God’s approachableness: it was the holy ark where God’s throne was set, placed in the center of the camp (except for the period of Israel’s sinfulness), with lights never to go out—it was God offering His salvation to all (2 Chronicles 35:3).

Every time we are transported into the throne room, there is a powerful display of God’s majesty and omnipotence, and Revelation 11:19 with its *lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail* is no exception. We also see similar displays of His awesomeness in Revelation 4:5, 8:5, and 16:18. These demonstrations of God’s might are to remind us of what an incredible God we serve! Are you worshiping and adoring the Lord God Almighty as He deserves?

TUESDAY: God’s Amazing Plan

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth (Revelation 12:1–2, emphasis added).

God shares His plan by opening all the end-time events to us through His servants like the apostle John. Consider these seven openings in heaven:

1. **God opens a door to worship:** ... *I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice ... was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this”* (Revelation 4:1).
2. **God opens the seals of His wrath:** ... *When the Lamb opened one of the seals ... I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, “Come and see”* (Revelation 6:1).
3. **God opens the pit of doom:** *And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose ... like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke ...* (Revelation 9:2).

4. **God opens His temple in heaven:** *Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail* (Revelation 11:19).
5. **God opens the tabernacle of His testimony:** *After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened* (Revelation 15:5).
6. **God opens the gates of heaven:** *Now 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* (Revelation 19:11).
7. **God opens the books of judgment:** *And 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 ... which were written in the books* (Revelation 20:12).

Revelation 12 also contains two signs—the sign of the woman and the dragon. In this highly symbolic section, God continues to show the unfolding of His plan as the world surrounds His nation, Israel.

The First Sign—a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet. In addition to Revelation 12:1, four other times Revelation mentions women who represent special things. In Revelation 2:20, Jezebel is a picture of Paganism in the church. In Revelation 12:6 the woman is Israel. The scarlet woman described in Revelation 17:1–6 is the apostate church. And in Revelation 19:7, the Lamb’s wife is the true church. Now let’s look at some ways Bible teachers have identified this woman in Revelation 12:1–2.

The woman’s clothing corresponds to Joseph’s dream. Genesis 37:9–11 reports that Joseph told his brothers and father about a dream in which “*the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to [him].*” His father *rebuked him* and his brothers *envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.* Joseph is describing Israel—the twelve tribes—the twelve sons in the family of Jacob, or Israel. The clear correspondence here to that truth made Joseph’s brothers angry.

The woman cries in labor. This speaks of the nation of Israel as they groan. Ever since they were in Egypt, they have complained: *Why is everyone against us?* When God sent forth His Son to be born in Israel, it was a time of oppression at the hand of Rome. All of Creation groans awaiting redemption, and all women groan in childbirth.

The woman’s exalted child can only be Jesus. He is the promised Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15); He is of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10); He is the Star of Jacob (Numbers 24:17–19); He is God with us (Isaiah 7:14); and He is the Son of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1).

The woman is cared for by God in the Tribulation hours. Only Israel is promised such care. It can't be the virgin Mary because she is gone. It is not the church because she is never supposed to hide for three and one-half years in the wilderness. It can't be Eve in the Garden of Eden because Eve is gone too. There is only one group of people who are going to be on earth with Satan chasing them during the Tribulation—a people clothed with the sun, moon, and stars—and that is Israel. What is amazing is that they are the only group of people for whom God has prepared a place in the wilderness to hide!

The Second Sign—a great, fiery red dragon. Revelation 12:3 reveals that *Another sign appeared in heaven: ... a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.* This is an easy sign because Satan has been well identified throughout the Scriptures as the serpent, that old dragon, the devil. Satan is the author of the Fall (Genesis 3:14a), the prince of this world (John 12:31; see also 14:30 and 16:11), a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), and an adversary (1 Peter 5:8).

Now that we have identified the *fiery red dragon* as Satan, we must address the *seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads*. The seven heads are later stated to be seven past kingdoms (Revelation 17:10) and the ten horns to be ten kings of the end times (17:12). This beast is quite similar to the one Daniel saw with one head and ten horns (Daniel 7:7, 20, 24).

As we close today's devotional, I exhort you to remain alert to Satan's mission: he aims "*to steal, and to kill, and to destroy*" you, so stay vigilant! Remember: that old serpent is a defeated foe, and if you resist him through the power of God's Word and His might, Satan will flee from you!

WEDNESDAY: Satan's Origin and Activity

His tail drew a third of the stars [angels] of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born (Revelation 12:4, emphasis added).

Where did the devil come from? He was formerly the highest-ranking angel in heaven—Lucifer. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 tell us that Satan was perfect in his original creation, and that he was the "*covering cherub*" over the throne of God, reflecting His glory. He walked in the garden of God and then fell into sin. Isaiah describes his fall from heaven through his five "I wills" that culminated in the heart of his iniquity: "*I will be like the Most High*" (Isaiah 14:12–14). Jesus Himself acknowledged this fall when He said: "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*" (Luke 10:18). Satan was thrown out of heaven because of pride. Because pride competes with God for control and glory, it is therefore the root of all sin.

When Satan fell from heaven, it appears that he took one-third of the angels to earth with him (Revelation 12:4). What is Satan doing now? His present activity is detailed in 2 Corinthians 4:3: *But even if our gospel is veiled [by Satan], it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded ...* (2 Corinthians 4:3, emphasis added). When you share the

gospel, and a person looks right at you and says, “I don’t get it, and I don’t want it,” you are seeing the blinding power of Satan in this world.

Many books are being written about “out of body” experiences of people who have died. They commonly report going to a great lighted place where a white-haired man talks to them. This is exactly what Satan is and does today. He does not wear red tights and have a pitchfork tail—he is an angel of light and a deceiver: ... *Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness ...* (2 Corinthians 11:14–15, emphasis added).

What can Satan do? Satan is powerful, but he can do only what God allows (Job 1:12, 2:4–7). However, that is substantial. He tempted Eve and thereby brought sin into the world (Genesis 3); he tempted Christ (Matthew 4); he perverted God’s Word (Matthew 4); he hindered God’s servant (1 Thessalonians 2); he fought with Michael (Jude 9); he hinders the gospel (2 Corinthians 4); he snares the wicked (1 Timothy 3); he accuses the brethren (Revelation 12:10); he desires the nations (Revelation 16); and he has the world under his controlling influence (1 John 5).

Now look at Revelation 12:5: *She bore a male Child [Christ] who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne* (v. 5). In this verse, there are three elements unique to Jesus in the entire universe: (1) His Incarnation (“*bore a male Child*”); (2) His Ascension (“*caught up to God*”); and (3) His Second Coming (“*His throne*”).

This *male Child* is to rule all nations with a rod of iron: *“Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel”* (Psalm 2:8).

Biblical scholars differ as to who this *male Child* is, and here are a few of their conclusions: Scott, Newell, Gaebelein, and Alford believe that the *male Child* refers to Christ; Ironside thinks he is Christ and the true church—His body; and Seiss considers him to be the invisible church. Personally, after much study, I am convinced that verse 5 is talking about the incarnated, ascended, and glorified Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for Jesus being *caught up* is *harpazō*, and is the same word used for both the Rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and Paul being ... *caught up to the third heaven* (2 Corinthians 12:2).

In Revelation 12:6, we now see a reference to the second half of the Tribulation: *Then the woman fled into the wilderness [to] ... a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.* Seven years divided in half is three and one-half years, forty-two months, or 1,260 days—all of which are metaphors for the second half of the Tribulation. That is the time the Antichrist goes into the temple of God in Jerusalem, sets up an image for himself, and starts persecuting the Jews. However, God will protect them again.

Aren’t you grateful that as all this is unfolding, you will be safe in your eternal refuge—Jesus Christ? As a child of God, never forget that you are a member of the winning team!

THURSDAY: Satan's Defeat

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; [but] the dragon and his angels ... did not prevail, ... So the great dragon was cast out ... to the earth, and his angels ... with him (Revelation 12:7–9, emphasis added).

In Revelation 11:19–12:6, we have seen our victory in Jesus because God is faithful. Next we need to consider our victory in Jesus because Satan is vanquished. It is critical that we understand what is going on in the heavenly places around us.

In the whole universe, there is only God and His Creation. The Bible clearly tells us that the entire universe is involved with what is happening on earth because, after God is finished with the Tribulation and the Millennium, He is going to destroy the whole universe and make it brand new. Everything that is happening is happening right here on earth. There are no civilizations on other planets in need of Jesus as Lord and Savior. There are only the humans on earth and the humans under the earth—in Hades; and there are only the angels sealed by God and the fallen angels who joined Satan's army.

If that is all there is—God, humans, and angels—what about UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects) and science fiction? Why is the world being conditioned for powerful beings that come to earth from somewhere else? The answer is simple: earth dwellers are being prepared for “*the beast*”—the ultimate extra-terrestrial being who will be released from the pit. It is possible that he could arrive in a space ship, because the world is getting ready for that. But regardless of *how* he comes, he will do so with great powers to control the minds of men.

Can you imagine the effect he will have on this planet? We have terrorists, rogue nations with ballistic missiles and atomic bombs, and biological agents for use in warfare. The world is highly unstable. With all that is going on, it is easy to imagine that someone transported to earth who can perform miracles and control minds will be able to control the world. This is the Antichrist—the one in the place of Christ. So the earth dwellers will conclude: *Who needs Jesus—the lowly One from Bethlehem?*

The advent of “*the beast*” will be an actual historical event, and Revelation shows us the whole panorama in advance. Up until chapter 12 of Revelation, although God had cast Satan out of his place in heaven, He did not restrict his coming into heaven to accuse believers. Presently, when an individual Christian has sinned and Satan becomes aware of it, it is an opportunity to go before God and accuse that person. Always remember that even though we bear God’s image and have His name, we can still “act like the devil” at times. When that happens, Jesus steps forward to remind Satan that He has paid for our sins and we belong to Him now! Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Arise My Soul Arise,” says: *Five bleeding wounds He bears, Received on Calvary; They pour effectual prayers, They strongly plead for me; “Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry, “Nor let that ransomed sinner die!”*

Satan is being allowed to interrupt the worship of heaven for a limited time only before God will cast him down forever, bar his access, and restrict him to troubling the earth only.

You might still be wondering: *What is this celestial warfare all about?* Michael the archangel, a warrior, stands in as commander-in-chief for the King of Kings. He first appeared at the burial of Moses. Because of disobedience (Numbers 20:7–11), Moses forfeited his entrance to the Promised Land, but God let him see it from afar before he died (Deuteronomy 34:5–6). Satan wanted to take Moses' body to use as a snare for God's people—like when the brazen serpent used by Moses was transformed into an idol (2 Kings 18:4). The lifeless body of Moses would have been used to start an idolatrous false worship of a messenger in place of the Master. (Miracles associated with dead bones are some of Satan's biggest lies that enslave and destroy multitudes even today.)

Michael also shows up in Daniel 10 in his work of fighting the principalities (leaders of fallen angels): “*But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withheld me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia*” (Daniel 10:13).

In Ephesians 6:12, Paul warns us: *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, ... powers, ... rulers of the darkness of this age, ... spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* Paul uses the Greek word *arche*, normally translated “principalities,” seven other times (Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21, 3:10; Colossians 1:16, 2:15; Titus 3:1). Each time the context is similar to that of Ephesians 6:12, so we can assume that these listings in verse 12 are classes of fallen angels who oversee the hindering of God’s work in various nations.

Michael will also figure in the final conflict: “*At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, ... and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book*” (Daniel 12:1). These words are happening as we open to Revelation 12.

In Revelation 12:7–9, Michael leads God’s angels to victory. This becomes significant when we note that Michael is identified with the nation Israel (Daniel 10:10–21; 12:1; see also Jude 9). Another key is that the name Michael may mean “Who is like God?” This could point to Satan when he rebelled against the Lord and said, “I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14). Michael’s very presence fighting Satan is part of the ancient conflict between God and Satan. Satan wanted to be like God, but Michael’s name implies that “no one can be like God”—because there is only *one* God. This battle may occur because the devil’s unbridled hatred of Israel spurs him to make one final assault against the throne of God. However, as recorded, Michael and the angels of God will defeat him. Amazingly, Revelation 12:9 is the middle verse of the book of Revelation—and the turning point in eternity!

If you have not yet bowed your knee to Jesus, and embraced Him as your Savior, today can be your “turning point” for eternity. Don’t delay! Time is short!

FRIDAY: Saints That Overcome

... “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. 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” (Revelation 12:10-12, emphasis added).

We have seen our victory in Jesus because God is faithful (11:19–12:6) and Satan is vanquished (12:7–9). Yet, as verses 10–12 above explain, the saints on earth will suffer. In that passage, many avenues of our powerful victories over Satan are stated. They, like us, will overcome as more than conquerors through the blessedness of four powerful weapons:

1. **The Word of Testimony:** They will overcome Satan by the reality of their testimony because they have embraced Christ’s salvation by faith, and He lives within them. People are saved not by what they say, but by the Word of God which is ... *living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12).
2. **The Name of Jesus:** ... *God ... has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name ...* (Philippians 2:9).
3. **The Blood of the Lamb:** “*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 12:11).
4. **The Cross of Calvary:** *And you, being dead in your trespasses ..., He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses ...* (Colossians 2:13).

Last of all, our attention is drawn to the triumph factor. John says, *And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which kept the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ* (Revelation 12:17 KJV). Satan cannot win. “Just as the blood of the martyrs has proved to be the seed of the church, so during the Tribulation, persecution will but drive many Jewish people into the arms of the Lord Jesus. Satan, in his rage, displays a notable lack of imagination and originality. He has tried persecution many times before, and it has always failed to deter faith and conversion. That he tries it again is a mute confession of failure, the last resort of a desperate and darkened mind. The godly

Jews will not recant. They will only scatter far and wide, bearing as they go the gospel of the Kingdom and their triumph will be complete.”¹

What can Satan do with the likes of these godly Jews? Lock them up in prison, and they will convert their jailers; torture them, and they will become partakers of Christ’s sufferings and heirs to a great reward; martyr them, and they will go straight to be with Christ; turn them loose, and they will evangelize the world! The more the saints suffer, the more they will draw on Christ; the more they serve Christ, the more they will defeat the devil and have victory in Christ!

Learn from these faithful saints; do not shrink back from the persecution and affliction that is likely to come at work, in your family, and in society. Through the Word of God, the name of Jesus, the blood of the Lamb, and the cross of Calvary—be a saint who overcomes through Christ—like the faithful suffering saints in Revelation 12!

SATURDAY: The Conflict of the Ages

... The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood, which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who ... have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:16–17, emphasis added).

God has a place prepared for Israel; it could even be in Petra or Jordan. It does not matter where it is, but God will send the Jews there. When Satan sees them flee, he will cause the beast to send a mighty army that is like a *flood*, but it will be *swallowed up* (Revelation 12:16).

We see this same type of judgment in Numbers 16:1–40. Because of the rebellion of Korah, the earth opened up and swallowed those who rebelled against Moses and God—and they went alive into the pit. (This is another indication that Hades is most likely in the center of the earth.)

Satan has always tried to destroy his mortal enemy—the Seed of the woman. All of history has been a record of this conflict between the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman. Satan has tried to stop God’s plan all along the way.

- Satan attempted to destroy God’s plan when Cain murdered Abel (Genesis 4).
- Satan attempted to destroy God’s plan by demonic intrusion into the human line before the Flood (Genesis 6).
- Satan attempted to destroy God’s plan through Goliath, as the serpent’s seed sought to destroy the line of the woman’s Seed as young David stood before him (1 Samuel 17).
- Satan attempted to destroy God’s plan through Haman, a descendent of Agag the Amalekite. At Satan’s prompting, Haman nearly succeeded at wiping out the Jews (the book of Esther).

- Satan attempted to destroy God's plan by the decree of Herod to kill all the male infants (Matthew 2:13).
- Satan attempted to destroy God's plan by tempting Jesus to take the easy road (Matthew 4).
- Satan attempted to destroy God's plan as he entered the infuriated mob that sought to cast Jesus over a cliff (Luke 4:28–29).

Satan hates the Lamb of God and all His followers—whether Jew or Gentile. Therefore, he actively wages war against those who seek to obey God's Word above all else!

Make a choice to live in hope. From Eden onward, there have been two groups on earth: two churches, two congregations, and two directions.

Satan and the Rebels	God and the Saints
Drunken harlot	Chaste bride
Followers of lies	Seekers of Truth
Earth dwellers	Pilgrims
Walkers by sight	Walkers by faith
Hellish	Heavenly

But a collision lies ahead: Satan's kingdom is nearing its final hours on earth—a time when the powers of darkness, demons, and all will rule. The earth will follow the false god, the Antichrist!

There are two competitions—two destinies:

- **Choose Christ:** Follow Adam; pass Golgotha and the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ; trust in Christ and go to heaven.
- **Choose the Antichrist:** Follow Cain; pass Babel and the confusion of religion, and go to the lake of fire.

In this battle for the planet Earth, the victory is in Christ! God's faithfulness to His Word means that Satan is vanquished. If you already know the Lord Jesus, I pray that you will choose to be an overcomer by living in hope through God's Word, the blood of the Lamb, the cross of Calvary, and the name of Jesus that is above all names!

In closing, this old song by Francis Havergal captures what your spirit ought to be like during this conflict of the ages. As you meditate upon its words, ask yourself: *Am I really on the Lord's side?* I encourage you to then personalize the words of this wonderful song to make it the prayer of your heart.

Who Is on the Lord's Side?

*Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the King?
Who will be His helpers, Other lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's side? Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side? Who for Him will go?
By Thy call of mercy, By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!*

*Not for weight of glory, Nor for crown and palm,
Enter we the army, Raise the warrior psalm;
But for Love that claimeth Lives for whom He died:
He whom Jesus nameth Must be on His side.
By Thy love constraining, By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!*

*Jesus, Thou hast bought us, Not with gold or gem,
But with Thine own life-blood, For Thy diadem;
With Thy blessing filling Each who comes to Thee,
Thou hast made us willing, Thou hast made us free.
By Thy grand redemption, By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!*

*Fierce may be the conflict, Strong may be the foe,
But the King's own army None can overthrow;
'Round His standard ranging, Victory is secure,
For His truth unchanging Makes the triumph sure.
Joyfully enlisting, By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!*

—Francis R. Havergal

Week 33—Marvel at the Genuine Jesus

(Revelation 13)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you marvel at the genuine Jesus!



SUNDAY: How to Escape the Mark of the Beast

[He] ... is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ... (Jude 1:24, emphasis added).

As the end of the world approaches, so does earth's darkest hour. Hell will soon open, and the pit will vomit out its demon hordes to run wildly throughout humanity. Other beasts from the abyss will globally wreak death and destruction. Satan himself will invade the earth and seemingly conquer it at last.

At the helm, the visible leader of the world will be the long promised man of sin, the lawless one, the beast, the coming world leader—commonly known as the Antichrist. But behind him, the real power will be the god of this world, the dragon, old Lucifer, the lying serpent of Eden.

Imagine what it would be like if that perfect leader were to step forward tomorrow—a man who appears to seemingly come out of nowhere—almost a person from the past who rolls into one all the great leaders of the world. Imagine one man with the strength of a Caesar, the military genius of an Alexander, the mesmerizing oratory of a Hitler, the warmth of a Ronald Reagan, the ruthless determination of a Ghenghis Khan, and the apparent compassion and tenderness of Jesus Christ!

John Phillips writes: “In 1 Timothy 4:1–3, the Bible clearly teaches that we can expect this invasion from the pit in the last days. During the final days, most people will be led astray by evil spirits and occult teachings. The shadows of these times are already darkening the world. Nothing but the restraining presence of God the Holy Spirit is holding back the floodgates of this time of evil. ... Advanced demonism was the mark of Noah’s day; [and] it is becoming an increasingly evident characteristic of the age in which we live.”¹

Revelation 13 explains (as do other scriptures) what I consider to be one of the saddest doctrines in the Bible—the teaching about the Antichrist, which tells us that the FALSE Christ will be universally embraced by the world after the TRUE Christ has been rejected! (Emphasis added to the verses below.)

"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand) ... (Matthew 24:15).

"For false christs [pseudo-christs] and false prophets [pseudo-prophets] will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).

"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, ... He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time" (Daniel 7:21, 25).

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders ... (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Far more lethal than rampant viruses, far more poisonous than radioactivity or toxins, a counterfeit Christianity is seeping into our world. Jesus warned of a coming day of deception that was so intoxicating that without His intervention even God's children would succumb. Revelation 13 shows the second flood, which will destroy our world. The first flood in Genesis was with water from God to judge sinful humanity. This second flood is with deception from Satan to seal the doom of humans unwilling to follow the Lord.

Perhaps the Antichrist will step into the world from a battlefield or maybe from the United Nations. Very possibly, a glowing metallic UFO will slowly descend in a globally watched spot and, before the wondering eyes of all the inhabitants of the earth, out will step the ultimate Superman—the first beast! In concise word pictures, John describes the culmination of the lies of Satan. Mankind needs to beware of Satan's counterfeit authority (Revelation 12:17–13:2), counterfeit resurrection (Revelation 13:3–5), counterfeit citizenship (Revelation 13:6–10), counterfeit worship (Revelation 13:11–15), and counterfeit security—the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16–18).

How can you escape these counterfeits of Satan? The only place of safety is to have the security that the *real* Christ gives. May the wonders of this chapter cause you to seek God's mark—and not the mark of the beast!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord, as we read the words in Revelation 13, we are grieved to think of someone who will blaspheme Your name, Your dwelling place—the very God of heaven! We are grieved that he will be allowed to parade and march up and down on this planet for forty-two months, imitating Your three and one-half years of ministry—even imitating Your resurrection from the dead, Lord Jesus—and imitating Your power from heaven. We love You, so our hearts are grieved to think that mankind and humanity would stoop to the depths to be led by this monster from the pit! We want to magnify Your name, for the world is coming to a day when it will seek to obliterate the name of the true and living God—the Creator, the Redeemer, and the righteous judge from the very consciousness of this planet. We pray that You might be praised through us, and that we might be among those who turn many to righteousness that we might all shine like the stars forever. May we have Your compassion, Lord Jesus, to tell everyone about You, and earnestly plead, like Paul, with them so that they might be reconciled to God and avoid the terror of the Lord. Give us an insatiable desire to win souls to You, Lord Jesus. Help us to faithfully tell people that before them is a choice, a destiny, and a destination that is either blessed or horrible, and that they must choose life and look at the Savior. Enable us to see You clearly! We pray all these things in Your precious name. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Ultimate Superman—the Beast

I was considering the horns, and there was ... a little one ... before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words (Daniel 7:8, emphasis added).

Impossible? No. He is coming. He may well be walking around today. Ever since Eden, mankind has sought to be “like God” and in this insatiable quest has come the glorification of the “creature more than the Creator.” This exaltation of man has allowed men of strong persuasion to be able to rise to extreme heights of power. In history these have been the Ramses, Alexanders, Caesars, and Napoleons. But there is a man on the horizon whose rise shall be as the sun’s rays across the earth; he shall be the embodiment of such power and personage that the entire world will be astounded by him. Thus, he will be sought after like no other leader before.

He will be one who seems to stop all threats from weapons of mass destruction. He will take charge and bring an end to the simmering hatred and volatile ethnic conflicts around the planet. The global fear of terrorism, biological warfare, and food shortages will cease through his leadership. He also seems to triumph in a global form of religion that the world can finally agree to. It may even be a counterfeit version of Christianity because “anti” means “in place of” Christ.

Here are some of the attributes that the Antichrist—this Superman of evil—possesses: (Emphasis added in the following verses.)

The Antichrist is Super-intelligent. He is portrayed as a Superman of intellect: "... *In this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man ...*" (Daniel 7:8).

The Antichrist is a Super-communicator. He is notable as a Superman of communication: "... *a mouth speaking pompous words*" (Daniel 7:8).

The Antichrist is a Super-politician. He is a Superman of politics who has unusual abilities to lead and persuade, and seems to conquer in peace: ... *he shall come in peaceably, and seize the kingdom by intrigue* (Daniel 11:21). In Revelation 6:2 he will ride a *white horse* and go out *conquering and to conquer*.

The Antichrist is a Super-businessman. He possesses extraordinary business abilities, and is a Superman of money: "... *He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; ... He shall destroy many in their prosperity ...*" (Daniel 8:25; see also Revelation 18.) He will organize or just use a global digitalization of commerce.

The Antichrist is a Super-general. He is the ultimate military strategist, a Superman of the military: "[He] ... *shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces*" (Daniel 7:23). We see the same power revealed in Revelation 13:4 and 7: *So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" ... And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.* He rules the world!

The Antichrist has a Super-ego. He is the Superman of megalomaniacs who lust for great and grandiose performances: ... *The man of sin ... opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God* (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4). From this, we clearly see his yearning to be "like the Most High God"!

Would it surprise you to know that Americans are actually looking for an ET (extra-terrestrial being) like this "Superman" to come and help? According to pollsters, 72 percent of Americans believe that there is life beyond the earth; 48 percent believe UFOs are real; and 15 percent have seen one, with 3 percent of Americans (that's almost nine million of us) being abducted by aliens into a UFO.

One noted journalist, after studying UFOs and those in contact with them, concluded: "The earth is not inhabited by them, it is infested." What do UFOs do to the Word of God and our faith? I have concluded that UFOs are demonic!

UFOs would support naturalistic evolution to the point of believing that perfection would overcome death, disease, and so forth. When people believe in extra-terrestrial intelligence, that would mean that evolution has gone on for who knows how many billion years and, somewhere out there, life has ascended higher than here on earth.

ETs lessen the incarnation of Jesus. If there really are many all-powerful aliens out there, this would be the common thinking: *What if Jesus did come? What difference does that really make? After all, it may be possible to overcome death and disease because all these beings that can fly around are superior to us, so they have obviously found the answer!*

That erroneous thinking would lead to this conclusion:

- The earth is just an insignificant dot in the universe.
- Man is not the crown of God's creation.
- Sin is just our problem, or not even a problem at all.
- Hope lies in contact with some of these "higher" life forms.
- Christ's death was a local rather than a cosmic event.
- The Word of God is anachronistic, local, and out of touch with the big picture of the cosmos.
- We are not in God's image.

That is what evolution, science fiction, and UFO-ology teaches! And those lies of Satan are deceiving mankind and thus determining their eternal destiny—separated forever from God in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels. We need to spread the Truth to the perishing every chance we get!

TUESDAY: The Person of the Antichrist

*And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring who ... have the testimony of Jesus Christ. ... And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now **the beast** which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. **The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority** (Revelation 12:17–13:2, emphasis added).*

As we examine the person of the Antichrist, drawn in the words of the apostle John, and see him whose cause is not only to be "anti" (opposed), but also "anti—" (the exact inverse of) Christ Jesus the Lord of glory, there are five horrible lies that this beast (the Antichrist) will foist upon the earth as he carries out his counterfeit operation of imitating Christ.

Lie One: The beast will offer a false authority. In Revelation 12:17–13:2 "*the beast*" is imitating the Kingdom of God, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Creator. Satan's counterfeit authority is rebellion against God, which actually started in the Garden of Eden when Eve questioned the goodness, authority, and right of God to limit. You can escape his false authority by keeping yourself under the authority of God.

Lie Two: The beast will offer a false resurrection. In Revelation 13:3–5, the beast causes the whole world to marvel at his counterfeit resurrection as he imitates the prince of life, the firstborn from the dead, the empty tomb, the way, the truth, and the only hope: *And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. ... So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" And he was ... given authority to continue for forty-two months.*

God allows the beast to be brought back to life after being mortally wounded. In every point, the beast will be mirroring the Lord Jesus Christ. He will be allowed to rule three and one-half years, which is the length of Christ's ministry, and he will counterfeit Old Testament miracles as well.

Lie Three: The beast will offer a false citizenship. In Revelation 13:6–10, he offers a counterfeit citizenship to the earth dwellers as he imitates the wonders of our Father's house He's preparing, the heavenly city, the streets of gold, and the Water of Life—making them here on earth and telling those people that they are not to wait for the Son of God from heaven: *Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over ... All who dwell on the earth ... whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. ... Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.*

In this passage, the beast starts a deadly rampage on the earth that causes a counterfeit citizenship. Those whose names are not in the Lamb's Book of Life will worship the beast. But Christians know that *our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:20).

Lie Four: The beast will offer false worship or religion. In Revelation 13:11–15, the second beast, the false prophet, affirms his false message that imitates the true worship of the living and true God in spirit and in truth, not self-styled but biblical: *Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast ... and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, ... And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs ..., telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image ..., that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

The term *another beast coming up out of the earth* is the same term used when Saul got the witch of Endor to conjure up Samuel. I am not sure how much God will allow here, but this second beast is an amazing creature. He will lead false worship. It is hard for us to comprehend right now, but we have become such a globally linked society that we know about things around the world as they are happening. As events happen, it will touch the whole world. This false resurrection will cause everyone in the world to be in wonder, because in the back of everybody's consciousness is the story of Christ. John 1:9 says: *That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.* There is a basic awareness of the true living God. When people see this, most of the world without loving the Truth will start falling for the lie—because they have never known the Word of God.

Lie Five: The beast will offer a false security. In Revelation 13:16–18, through the "mark," he is imitating the Holy Spirit's sealing of those in the Book of Life, betrothed to Christ, His very bride, kept and protected by the power of God unto salvation: *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. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

So then, how do we live in hope as we approach these fearsome days?

Examine your address label. Make sure you are addressed to the right destination. Ask yourself: *Am I really a citizen of heaven, or just an earth dweller?* Philippians 3:20 says that the born-again Christian's *citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* In light of that verse, step back and look at your direction. Honestly ask yourself: *Where am I really headed?* For God says: *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith ...* (2 Corinthians 13:5a).

Turn on your security system. Ask yourself: *Have I really turned on my security system? Am I an authentic, signed original? Am I a sealed and secure container of heavenly treasure?* One way to know if your security system is turned on is to watch what comes out of your life as your body ages and weakens. Is it the treasure of the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—that spills forth from inside? Or is it the works of the flesh that ooze out from within your soul? Second Corinthians 4:7 says, *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.* The weaker we get, and the shorter our time on earth, the more the treasure of Christ should spill out of our lives. Oh, how we should allow our weakness to show the righteousness of Christ coming out of us! So the next time you are sick, let the treasure of Christ come out instead of being irritable and angry.

Investigate the real thing. How well do you know Jesus by personal contact? How quickly do you recognize Him in His Book? Have you begun a lifelong pursuit of Jesus Christ in the Bible? Do you know the *real* well enough to recognize the *counterfeit*?

Let me remind you again that, to escape Satan's counterfeits, the *only* place of safety is to have the security that the *real* Christ gives! Have you fled to Him as your eternal refuge? If not, don't delay—He could come back *today!*

WEDNESDAY: The Prince That Shall Come

... The prince who is to come ... shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering ... (Daniel 9:26a, 27a, emphasis added).

The coming world leader, commonly known as the Antichrist, has thirty-three titles in the Old Testament and thirteen in the New Testament. One of these titles, "*the prince who is to come*," is from Daniel 9:26–27 where it was prophesied that the people of this "prince" would destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its fulfillment occurred in history when the Roman legions under Titus Vespasian destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. This reflexive reference

to the Romans in Daniel 9:26 is one of several reasons why many Bible scholars view the future “*prince who is to come*” as a Roman or European.

- **The Beast from the Sea—Revelation 13:1–10:** He is the Roman prince of Daniel 9 who will break his covenant with the Jews at the middle of the week. He is the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness (Pentecost, Seiss, Newell). Some think that verse 3 means that he will be raised from the dead (Seiss, Newell).
- **The Beast from the Earth—Revelation 13:11–18:** He is the false prophet—apparently a Jewish religious leader who causes men to worship the first beast. He has the power to do miracles to deceive men (vv. 14–15). Some interpret the Antichrist as “the one instead of Christ” (Scott, Ironside, Gaebelein, Kelly); others see him as the “one opposed to Christ” (Pentecost).

These beasts make war with the saints and overcome them (v. 7). All who are not of the elect will worship the first beast (v. 8). By economic warfare they can starve out those who will not worship the first beast (vv. 16–17).

Point by point, the beast is a poor imitation of Christ. As we examine him in his falseness, gaze at Christ’s beauty and see Him more clearly for who He is today! Here are some interesting insights on the beast.

The Peacemaker—Revelation 6:1–2: Certainly, this man will be on the scene before the Rapture occurs. He will be a peaceful political leader who unites ten nations of Europe into a strong power bloc (see Revelation 17:12–13). The rider on the white horse will imitate Christ (Revelation 19:11ff). He will go forth to conquer peacefully, and will have a bow, but no arrows. He will bring a brief time of peace to the world (1 Thessalonians 5:1–3) before the storm of the day of the Lord breaks loose.

The Protector—Daniel 9:24–27: Although we examined the exciting details of this prophecy in Week 31, it is important to recall certain facts. First, the prophecy applies to Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple, and not to the church. Second, it announces the time when Messiah will come and accomplish certain purposes for the Jewish people. The word “week” refers to a period of seven years; seventy weeks are equal to 490 years. Note that these 490 years are divided into three parts: (1) seven weeks or forty-nine years, during which the city would be rebuilt; (2) sixty-two weeks or 434 years, at the end of which time Messiah would come and be cut off; and (3) one week or seven years, during which a “prince” would have a covenant with Israel. The seventieth week will start with the arrival of Antichrist. He will make a covenant with Israel to protect her and permit her to rebuild her temple. This covenant will be for seven years. He will temporarily solve the Middle East crisis. Israel will rebuild her temple in peaceful times. It is the signing of this covenant, not the Rapture of the church, which signals the start of Daniel’s seventieth week, that seven-year period known as the day of the Lord.

The Peace-Breaker—Daniel 9:27: After three and one-half years, Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews and take over their temple. This was what Paul termed “the falling away” (2 Thessalonians 2:3b). A better translation would be “the rebellion, the apostasy.” Not simply *a* rebellion, but *the* rebellion. Up to this point, Antichrist has been a peacemaking leader of ten European nations, obligated to protect Israel. But now he will reveal his true character by taking over the Jewish temple and demanding that the world worship him (see Revelation 13). Since the Antichrist will be energized by Satan, it is no surprise that he will seek worship; Satan has always wanted the worship of the world. In church history, there have been various apostasies when groups have turned away from God’s truth, but this final rebellion will be the greatest of all. The man of sin will oppose everything that belongs to any other religion, true or false. He will organize a world church that will, by worshiping him, actually be worshiping Satan. Our Lord predicted this apostasy: He called it “*the abomination of desolation*” (Matthew 24:15), a clear reference to Daniel 9:27. The world will wonder at this great leader who, with Satan’s power, will perform signs and wonders and deceive the nations.

The Persecutor—Revelation 13:15–17: Most prophetic students agree that the abomination of desolation will occur three and one-half years after the Antichrist makes his covenant with the Jews (Daniel 9:27—“in the middle of the week,” or three and one-half years). This will usher in a period of intense persecution and tribulation. Jesus said, “*For then there will be great tribulation ...*” (Matthew 24:21a). Satan will vent his wrath against Israel. He will so control the world’s economic system that citizens must bear “the mark of the beast” to be able to buy and sell (Revelation 13:16–17).

The Prisoner—Revelation 19:11–21: Keep in mind that God has a timetable. Satan will not be permitted to control the world forever. Jesus Christ will return “*in power and great glory*” and take the Antichrist, his associates, and Satan prisoner and cast them into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1–3). This will be the climax of the great Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16), during which the nations of the world unite with Satan to fight Jesus Christ. This leads to our next event.

What insights can we glean from these interesting insights on the beast? We are reminded of these truths: only Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6); only Jesus is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; only Jesus keeps all His promises; only those who come to Him have peace—the rest are like the restless sea; only Jesus gives true rest for the souls of those who come to Him (Matthew 11:28–30); and only Jesus can set you free (John 8:32–34)! A God like this deserves our *all!*

THURSDAY: Completely Confusing Times Are Coming

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. ... It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation (Revelation 12:17; 13:7, emphasis added).

When Christ returns there will be powerful, pervasive, and universal lies backed by the most believable signs and wonders ever witnessed on planet Earth. What will life on earth be like during these dark times? Let's look again at the verses from Revelation 12 and 13 above to remind us.

When Jesus came to earth, He was God in human flesh; as the Christ, He was the expression of all the promises of God. To think that **the Christ** in all His grace and beauty came to earth, stayed for thirty-plus years, was rejected as false and fake, and **almost no one followed Him**, is bad enough. But to know that Satan is going to send to earth the expression of all of mankind's desires in the person of **the Antichrist**, and in a very short time **almost all the earth will follow him**, is absolutely heart wrenching!

Imagine a leader as winsome as Reagan, as fearless as Alexander the Great, as mesmerizing as Hitler, as beloved by his people as George Washington, as great a leader as Moses, as unstoppable as Ghenghis Khan, and as spiritually charismatic as David—all in ONE man.

Now imagine that man openly displaying supernatural power in public, and being seen worldwide by way of the electronic media! It will appear that he is from heaven, and he will claim to be God. He will do miracles that everyone can see and believe in, and then offer himself to the world as their Christ.

There is a day coming soon when most people on earth will want to follow this ultimate "Superman." That is the saddest commentary on the fallen heart of humanity there could ever be—always wanting the wrong choice!

We have had several warm-up acts by Satan for this future main event of the final Antichrist. We can see the way Satan works most clearly in the life and accomplishments of Adolph Hitler. Hitler showed the world how just one man can lift a nation from the depths of economic ruin to the heights of power in a very short time (1933–1939)—and then lead the world into the deadliest war of all time (1939–1945). In six years Hitler came uncomfortably close to conquering the world, which is a vivid example of how Satan can indwell and completely harness one man.

Hitler was an Antichrist. Rick Warren writes, "People who had personal contact with Hitler often spoke of the strange hypnotic power he was able to exert. In 1943, 100,000 young people in brown shirts filled the Olympic stadium in Munich, Germany, the largest stadium in the world at that time. They formed with their bodies a sign for a fanatical man standing behind the podium. The message read, 'Hitler, we are yours.'"²

At the monument to Hitler's evil, the death camp Auschwitz, are the words of Hitler's vision of a generation of young people without a conscience. These words are aptly hung on a wall, grimly reminding the visitor of the hell unleashed when this goal was realized: *I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality. ... We will train young people before whom the world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence—imperious, relentless and cruel.*

On display for all to behold are thousands of pounds of women's hair, retrieved and marketed as a commodity by the Nazi exterminators, architects of the final solution that sent

multitudes to the gas ovens. The incredible reminders cast an overwhelming pall of somberness upon the visitor.³

But how did Satan find and use Hitler? Find out in tomorrow's lesson!

FRIDAY: Satan Was the Original Antichrist

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44, emphasis added).

Lucifer was the original Antichrist. Isaiah 14 reveals that he wanted the power of God and the worship of God for Himself. He demanded equality with the Lord God Almighty. In fact, according to Ezekiel 28, he was "*the anointed cherub [angel].*" He was "*full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.*" His response to his endowment by God was one of pride and rebellion.

God rejected his power play and promised his doom in hell in the future. But until that time, Lucifer (Satan) is on the prowl, seeking likely candidates he can lead into occult worship. Rebellion gives Satan an open invitation to establish a stronghold in the rebel's life. Understand this: occult involvement is actually worship of his infernal majesty—Satan!

Satan looks for rebels. Lucifer was the original rebel, and he is looking for rebels to enlist for his own selfish purposes. Rebellion against authority makes a person a prime target for satanic attack.

Hitler is a prime example of the rebellion-occult connection. His early life could be characterized by one word: failure. He had a meager existence while living on his dead mother's limited savings and an Orphan's Pension which came from his father's service in the Customs Department. His attempt at higher education was thwarted. He wanted to be an artist, so he applied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, but they refused to accept him because his sketches were not up to required standards. Next, he applied to the School of Architecture and was refused. Author Trevor Ravenscroft observes that because Hitler was unable to make friends, he became a more solitary and embittered figure.

To make a long story short, Hitler was angry at God and society because of his plight in life, so he rebelled against both. In his quest for power to change his plight, young Hitler turned to the occult. He began by spending all his free time in the Hofberg Library in Vienna, Austria. He read books on the history of the occult and Eastern religions, but the occult seemed to offer the power for which he was searching.

Demons controlled Hitler. The demons that controlled the demented soul of Adolph Hitler lured him and Germany into World War II, and then abandoned both him and his country to their fate. Hitler and his fellow conspirators came close to succeeding. They failed because the time was not yet ripe in the counsels of God for the forces of Satan to triumph. However, the

whole Nazi era was a dress rehearsal for the coming of the beast and the consequent baptism of unregenerate mankind into just such a religion.⁴

Hitler—like Satan—was a destroyer. He found that Satan lived up to the titles given him in Revelation 9:11: *And 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.* The translation of both words is “destroyer.” Hitler was used by Satan to destroy six million plus of God’s chosen people. Multiplied thousands more were destroyed in war. Then in mockery of Hitler himself, Satan motivated him to commit suicide, destroying himself.

One of the primary characteristics of those who get involved in the occult, like Hitler, is rebellion against authority. This rebellion is usually evident in one or more of the following three areas: (1) rebellion against parents; (2) rebellion against society; and (3) rebellion against Christianity.

Why do many of those who rebel against parents, society, and Christianity often end up involved in the occult? Those who know the Bible can tell you: rebellion and occult involvement are linked, *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry ...”* (1 Samuel 15:23a).

Beware of giving place to the devil. Listen to Paul’s stern warning to Christians in Ephesians 4:27, ... *nor give place to the devil.* Everywhere and always demons have lurked in the dark for the moment when a person becomes weak, when he arbitrarily abandons his human situation in the world order founded by God for him. ... After the first voluntary downward step he is compelled to the second and third with rapidly increasing speed. ... Man is unprotected against evil without the living God; he is like a boat without oars, exposed to the tempest, or like a baby without a mother, or like a cloud which dissolves.⁵

Today, thoughtfully and carefully read Ephesians 4:27–5:8 and note each area Paul describes. These are the potential places Satan starts devouring us spiritually. Avoid allowing him to find these “landing spots” in your life.

SATURDAY: The Only Protection from Satan—God’s Signature

[You] ... *are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time* (1 Peter 1:5, emphasis added).

When you call upon Christ in repentant faith, God saves you. Salvation is the greatest work of God in the universe. Some years ago a man in a penitentiary studied a Moody correspondence course. He found Christ. 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 what salvation is.

But salvation will go even further than that prisoner realized. One day he will be a new man in a new body. I like to call the work of salvation the signature of God—when God writes Himself across our lives. Listen to this summary of what happens to each of us who come by faith to God through Christ: (Emphasis added to the verses below.)

- **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, and you will keep My judgments and do them"* (Ezekiel 36:26–27).
- **Conversion—when God changes my life:** *"... Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:3).
- **Repentance—when God changes my mind:** *"... Bear fruits worthy of repentance..."* (Matthew 3:8). When God transforms our minds we change. When we believe right, we begin to behave correctly.
- **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 ...* (Romans 8:15–16).
- **Sanctification—when God changes my behavior:** *For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us ...: "I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them ..."* (Hebrews 10:14–16).
- **Justification—when God changes my state:** *... Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1). What does it mean to be “justified”? In popular, everyday language, the word can be paraphrased: “just as if I’d never sinned.” It means that God has no record of anything ever having gone wrong in our lives.
- **Glorification—when God changes my place:** *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world"* (John 17:24).⁶ I encourage you to write these in your Bible, then believe them, live them, and share them as you act on the reality of God’s signature across your life!

Make a choice to live in hope. When God writes Himself across your life through faith in Jesus Christ, you have the enduring hope that one day you will behold the brightness of Christ’s face for all eternity! No matter how dark it gets in the meantime, Jesus will whisper to your soul: “Fear not, I am with you—peace, be still!” For He has promised to never leave or forsake you; nor will He ever test you beyond what you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). And every time you recall that *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world* (1 John 4:4 KJV), it gives you cause to keep singing His praises! Therefore, I hope that you can joyfully sing this song to the Lord today, thanking Him for His faithfulness in giving you such sweet hope in these bitter times.

He Keeps Me Singing

*There's within my heart a melody;
Jesus whispers sweet and low,
"Fear not, I am with thee, peace, be still,"
In all of life's ebb and flow.*

*Tho' sometimes He leads thro' waters deep,
Trials fall across the way;
Tho' sometimes the path seems rough and steep,
See His footprints all the way.*

*Soon He's coming back to welcome me
Far beyond the starry sky;
I shall wing my flight to worlds unknown,
I shall reign with Him on high.*

Refrain:

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Sweetest name I know,
Fills my ev'ry longing, Keeps me singing as I go.*

—Luther B. Bridgers, 1884–1948

Week 34—Feel the Compassion of Jesus

(Revelation 14)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you feel the compassion of Jesus!



SUNDAY: The Tide Turns in the War for Planet Earth

*Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him **one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.** And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps* (Revelation 14:1–2, emphasis added).

The tide of the war for planet Earth turns in Revelation 14. In this chapter, Jesus, in His glorified presence, is standing on His holy hill, Zion, and around Him stand His servants. Beneath Zion, the beast from the abyss, empowered by Satan, has crawled ashore. On the earth, death is stalking all who refuse Satan and turn to Jesus.

In Revelation 14, right in the middle of all hell breaking loose across this planet, what do we find? One of the most touching chapters in the Bible—a chapter exposing Christ's great compassion. For those chosen servants, the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, we find that this chapter sets forth the delights of life with Jesus.

In the first half of Revelation 14 we see that Jesus offers: **security** in the face of dangers (vv. 1–2); **joy** in the midst of desolation (v. 3); **purity** in the sea of filth (v. 4a); **truth** in a world of lies (v. 5); and **hope** in the land of doom (vv. 6–7).

In the second half of Revelation 14, we find that there is: **doom** without Jesus (vv. 8–11); **compassion** in the time of judgment (vv. 12–13); and **understanding** in a time of wrath (vv. 14–20).

Although these words in chapter 14 are directed to this special group called the 144,000, the whole book of Revelation was written to encourage the saints of all ages. So today we, too, can enjoy Jesus' security, joy, purity, truth, and hope! But side by side with all the love and compassion

of Christ is the result of choosing to ignore and reject His love. Apart from Jesus there is only hopeless and indescribable torment—torment without rest.

In Revelation 14:12–13, the Holy Spirit speaks for the first time, and a note of hope sounds. As He looks down at the multitudes on earth, the Holy Spirit expresses compassion for those saints who patiently endure.

When Jesus walked on earth as a human and a servant, there were only 250 million people on the planet. Presently, there are over six billion people, but by this point in Revelation, many will have died in the Tribulation. However, as He looks at an even greater multitude than those He saw in His earthly ministry, He is moved with sympathy and will encourage His servants before sending them back out. And if they still need help, He will send an angel to preach the gospel. What a compassionate heart!

In the midst of His children's martyrdom and pain, Jesus will offer His patience, obedience, faith, and hope of blessings. God's Word is so precise and inspired that it gives understanding in the time of wrath, for apart from Jesus there is only senseless and immeasurable bloodshed.

Ray Stedman noted that before this book of Revelation is over, we will look beyond these scenes of judgment, beyond the slaughter, beyond the misery that is to come upon the earth. There is a new day of the "winepress." When "Jacob's trouble" is finally over, Israel will blossom and spread its branches throughout the whole earth like a vine; and Israel's Messiah will reign. It will be the long awaited Utopia.¹ But before that morning dawns, the long night of the human race will grow darker, much darker.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, as we reflect upon what is coming in this chapter, we feel the sober nature of this passage—that Your judgment falls upon the earth after Your patience and mercy come to an end. It grieves our hearts to realize that so many will reject You and turn their hearts and souls away from Your mercy and grace. We see the harvest, the judgment, and that the harvester is the Lord of the harvest. You put Your messengers on this planet, and You send an angel to preach the everlasting gospel. You stand among Your servants calling all to come to You. Oh Christ, how we thank You for Your love and compassion! It strengthens our hearts to think of how merciful and gracious You are. How we pray that each of Your saints would be touched by Your compassion—that they would see as You see and have a heart of compassion as You have. Oh, that each one of us would give You our hands to serve You in the lives of others! Since people are all that can be taken to heaven with us, we want to take some with us. We want to be among those who point many to You, Lord Jesus. Touch our hearts with Your compassion and help us to see the horror of lostness and hardness. As the apostle Paul said, "knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." That is what You have left us to do. Help us to do it with all our hearts. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Jesus Offers Security and Joy

... One hundred and forty-four thousand [have] His Father's name written on their foreheads. ... And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang ... a new song before the throne ... and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth (Revelation 14:1b-3, emphasis added).

As the world plunges into desolation and destruction, God gives us living proof of His care! With Jesus are the blameless, unstoppable witnesses—all who have security because their Father's name is written on their foreheads. God is saying, "You are mine." God has named all the stars, which are merely inanimate objects, and He calls them each by name—but God's servants have the *Father's name* written on their foreheads.

Jesus offers security in the face of dangers. Because of His seal, the saints don't have to worry about getting the mark of the beast; they are impervious to it, and will not be tricked into wanting or taking it. As we step back and look at this scene, here is the blessing: all these servants have been deployed like commandos behind enemy lines; they are the ones who are risking their health and lives to give the gospel out during the Tribulation—and Jesus is right there in the middle of them!

Sometimes people quote Matthew 18:20 to me: "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*" But the context of Matthew 18 is church discipline where two or three witnesses are needed to turn someone over to the Lord for discipline. So I tell them that I have something even better—Jesus promised to come for just *one*: "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20).

Stedman says that heaven, as it is pictured in the Bible, is actually another dimension of existence, just beyond the reach of our five senses. You can be in heaven at the same time that you are on earth. As I read these prophetic passages of Scripture, I am more and more convinced that this is clearly the case: the church will be with the Lord, yet the Lord will be on the earth throughout those seven turbulent years. Amazingly, although the church will be with the Lord ministering to this select group of 144,000 Jews, it will be invisible to the rest of the world.

During this time, Jesus will periodically appear to these living Jews—standing with them and empowering them for their mission. If this is true, then Jesus will be in exactly the same condition with them as He was with the eleven disciples after His Resurrection, when for a period of forty days He appeared to them from time to time. And then He ascended out of sight into heaven in a cloud. As you examine the gospel accounts of the time between the Lord's Resurrection and Ascension, you find that He was often with them in various times, various places, and then suddenly He would not be with them. It was as if He would step back into the realm of invisibility after appearing for a while in their midst.²

In a very real sense, we are sitting in front of God's throne right now. While we are here on earth, we are in the presence of Jesus; He is here in the spiritual realm. When He comes again, He will just step between the dimensions of spiritual heaven and physical earth. In chapter 14,

we find Him standing on the earth prior to the Second Coming, for He has not yet come in the clouds of glory to reconquer the earth; He is just with His saints.

Jesus offers joy in the midst of desolation. People sing when they are happy, sad, and sometimes when they are scared—but most often when they have joy. These secure saints, the 144,000 servants of the Lord, have joy in the midst of the desolation of the planet. Everything has gone berserk: the sun is too hot; the waters are polluted; meteorites are crashing onto the earth; demons are running rampant, and yet these saints are singing a beautiful new song that rises above the screams of anguish and hatred.

Like Jeremiah in the smoking ruins of Jerusalem (see the book of Lamentations), God's faithfulness is seen anywhere and at any time. These saints express their intimacy with Jesus by a new song that no one knows but them. This is the second of three new treasures God gives His servants: (1) a new name (v.1); (2) a new song (v. 3a); and (3) a new destination (v. 3b).

When we are redeemed by the substitutionary work of Jesus on our behalf, we receive a *new name* to show that we are His new creations in Christ. We then get to live full of the Holy Spirit and experience that *new song*, which we sing all through life. (The Word of God describes nine new songs: Psalm 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10; Revelation 5:9; 14:3.)

If you get a report that your company is downsizing and you are out of a job, or your body is sick and is “downsizing” you right into heaven, or you have a financial crisis or some emotional tragedy, you can still have joy. How is that possible? Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. If you don’t have joy in your life, you are quenching the Spirit through coupling your life to your circumstances rather than letting Him produce His fruit of joy in your spirit. Joy is not to be attached to circumstances: joy is produced internally by the welling up of the Holy Spirit within us. So these 144,000 servants have joy in the midst of desolation.

You, too, can have joy today. Ask the Spirit of God to rule in your heart, to help you detach your life from circumstances and to attach to Him.

TUESDAY: Jesus Offers Purity in the Sea of Filth

They sang ... a new song before the throne. ... These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb (Revelation 14:3a, 4, emphasis added).

In the verse above, John further explains who the servants are that sing that new song. At this time the world is intoxicated with fornication, the wine of passion (14:8), for the earth dwellers *did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts* (9:21). So in the midst of such wickedness all over the planet, this group of servants stands out in their purity.

What does “*not defiled with women*” mean in verse 4? This phrase has been erroneously used to found all kinds of celibate cults throughout the years. It certainly means no fornication, uncleanness, or any other sexual immorality. It can also mean that they are literally like Jesus—

unmarried and kept for God's glory alone, and as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, "undistracted" by marriage. However, this is a spiritual scene: *For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ* (2 Corinthians 11:2). Does this mean that none of Paul's converts were married? No. Paul has gone from the physical realm of adultery, fornication, and immorality to the realm of spiritual adultery, fornication, and immorality—just as John does in verse 4.

When we become Christians, we are engaged to Jesus Christ, so we should keep ourselves from other suitors. Who are those suitors? We find the answer in James 4:4–5: *Adulterers and adulteresses! 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. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?"* You and I can commit sin by loving the world.

The world is the earth-dwelling system in which a person only lives for the moment (the pleasure, the thrill, the stuff, the toys, and the entertainment) instead of being a pilgrim and stranger on the earth and looking for heaven. Since you are engaged to Jesus, and He is preparing a home for you to dwell in forever with Him, if another suitor comes to you and says, "He is gone, so spend some time with me," you must firmly say NO. That is what the Christian life is like. Spiritual fornication is loving something that distracts us from our love for Christ. If you are attracted to the world more than to Christ, you are lustng after the world.

Our world is getting so vile: ... *It is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret* (Ephesians 5:12). I cannot tell you how many times I have been in the car listening to the news and had to turn it off to keep from hearing about the filth going on in our culture in the highest places of society. In our world there is a constant redefinition of sin. Sodomy has become "gay"; fornication and adultery have become "an affair." But God says fornication is any mental or physical sexual contact with someone who is not your husband or wife. He would thus consider sexual pictures, sensual phone conversations, and fantasy thoughts as adultery and fornication.

Those things destroy spiritual sensitivity, so God tells us clearly: *Do not love the world [all the lust, immorality, godlessness] or the things in the world [toys, trinkets, and distractions]. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh [desires and pleasure], the lust of the eyes [chasing after stuff we see], and the pride of life [status and power]—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever* (1 John 2:15–17).

I meet people all the time who want to know the will of God, and I tell them to stay pure. You will not know the will of God if you are living in impurity. You will not know the will of God if you are not a holy, chaste bride seeking out Christ alone. If you love the world and the stuff in the world you will not know the will of God because it is enmity with God to do so. What is the world? It is the whole system that draws us away from a holy walk with God. Television is a classic example: TV has conditioned us to act superficially. The end result is that many of God's children have become only "*hearers of the Word*" rather than "*doers of the Word*" (James

1:22–25). This, in turn, causes desensitization to the compassion of Christ. The world's system promotes our pride, assertiveness, and aggressiveness. And our busyness prevents us from having time for people.

In contrast, those who do not defile themselves, who stay pure with Jesus Christ and seek Him, *These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes* (Revelation 14:4). The Scriptures say that compassion is a universal language that does not require translation. People saw Christ's compassion in His eyes and His life; He did not have to declare it. A true servant of the Lamb will have His spiritual sensitivity; they can follow the Lamb and do His will because they will be pure. So then, if you want to know God's will, stay pure. Deny sin!

WEDNESDAY: Jesus Offers Truth in a World of Lies

And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God (Revelation 14:5, emphasis added).

In the company of the Lamb are those who rest in the absolute delights of His security, joy, purity, and truth. They are like Jesus of whom it was said: “[He] committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth ...” (1 Peter 2:22).

What is so marvelous is that the Holy Spirit presents these martyrs as the heroes of the book of Revelation. In our world it is popular to lie. People generally believe it is only a lie if you are under oath and there is a transcript, but the God of truth says: ... *Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment* (James 5:12).

Several years ago, someone wrote a book in which the author speculated as to what would happen if everyone told the truth—the government, the military, salesmen, financial markets, and married couples. What this ungodly writer had to say only points out the fact that worldly people know that they are lying.

These servants of the Lord in Revelation 14:5 have Truth in a world of lies, for they know the Christ who says: *I am the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:6). The world, however, is so much like their father the devil: *You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer ... and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him ...* (John 8:44).

How will these servants of the Lamb keep from becoming entrapped in the world's web of deceit? They will believe what God has revealed to them: *If you abide in My word, ... you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (John 8:31–32).

Modern history testifies to what will happen to those who hear the Truth of the Bible preached. To illustrate, go back with me to 1931—to a living legend named C. T. Studd. After serving fifteen years in China and six in India, he invested his final twenty-one in the heart of Africa's vast, dark jungles among the fierce, cannibal, head-hunting pygmies.

Once a lean and fit professional athlete, C.T. is now gaunt and emaciated. He is hunched over, halting with each step. But in July 1931 he is surrounded by thousands of glistening black bodies wearing banana leaves. The pygmies of the heart of Africa's jungles have come to hear their beloved Bwana for the last time. He speaks to them only after over two hours of singing the songs he had so lovingly taught them: "Wounded for me, wounded for me, there on the cross He was wounded for me, gone my transgressions and now I can sing, all because Jesus was wounded for me!"³

There in front of his cot sit 5,000 former headhunters. Once their bodies were the habitation of dark, foul fiends from the pit, but now they are temples of the living God. Once they were naked and grossly immoral lovers of darkness, but now they are not only clothed in Christ but also modestly clothed in banana leaves. Once they lived as a continuation of generations of murderers, years of darkness, and lives of savagery, but now, before their beloved father in the faith, they sit in an immense sea of white-toothed smiles. Once they were all mortal enemies, never without the weapons of war, but now no weapons of war are left, only the bond of love. With faces turned heavenward, these former enemies sit shoulder-to-shoulder, singing of the sweet by-and-by and that beautiful shore they will see some day.

Those saints were converted and transformed by the Lord through the simple passionate preaching of the Truth of God's Word in the Bible—and that Truth had set them free! Why have believers all through the ages seen lives transformed by the preaching of the gospel? Because they simply obeyed what Jesus left them and us to do—and soon the 144,000 Tribulation servants will be doing it as well.

This company around the Lamb are thus secure, joyful, pure, and truthful; they are like Jesus, "*Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth*" (1 Peter 2:22).

On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your truthfulness? Who are you following—the father of lies or the Father of truth?

THURSDAY: Jesus Offers Hope in the Land of Doom

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth ... saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Revelation 14:6–7, emphasis added).

I do not think we are going to turn the world around. We are not going to save the planet, and the ecology is not going to get better. But I still have great hope, knowing that those I lead to Christ will not be sealed by the Antichrist because they will already be sealed by the Spirit of God. They *will* have a future and a hope! That is why we can have hope in a world of doom; we

do not simply hide out, sitting on a mountaintop to wait for the end of the world. No, we rescue as many people as we can by telling them about Jesus.

These servants standing with Jesus in verses 6–7 are witnesses of the endless, unchangeable gospel. Mankind's only hope is to bow to their Creator and reach out to their Redeemer—or face Him as judge. All who have been saved in any age (law, church, or kingdom) were only saved by the sovereign grace of God, on the basis of the work that was accomplished by our Lord's atoning death. The eternal gospel is a proclamation to all who dwell upon the earth: every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. It is the good news that the judgment of God, so long awaited, is about to be consummated; and that the groaning earth will be brought back from the reign of the rebel prince, and put under the sway of the Son of God.

"The rod which Satan has held over the earth has been heavy because it has been held by Satan. The rod which the Lord Jesus is about to hold over the earth is an iron rod, but it is held in the hand of the One who has said, *"My yoke is easy, and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:30). Once more we repeat that men are saved only by the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. We believe that Adam and Eve were saved through believing God's Word concerning the Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15) and that in token of that salvation the Lord God made coats of skins (after having some sacrificial victim) and clothed them (Genesis 3:21). So much for the past. We believe that every blessing that will ever come to this earth or to any individual or group of individuals on it will come on the ground of Christ's death on the cross. But the open preaching of salvation to all who will come on the simple basis of trusting God's Word about the work that was accomplished on Calvary, is a phenomenon which begins with Pentecost."⁴

I personally believe that the gospel has always been the same: substitutionary atonement. From the Garden of Eden, as soon as Adam and Eve fell into sin, God killed an animal and clothed Adam and Eve with the skins. He could have taken cotton fiber and spun it, but it took a blood sacrifice to atone. This is the first example of being clothed with the righteousness of a blood sacrifice. Right from the beginning it has always been substitutionary atonement. Abel's offering on the altar was a lamb. God said that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head, and that the coming One would sacrifice Himself as Isaiah says in chapter 53. The gospel has always been the same: *"Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth..."* (Revelation 14:7).

There are three elements of the eternal gospel, which are always present.

Conviction—“Fear God”: If we preach a gospel without conviction, it is not the gospel of God. That is why it bothers me so much today that people can hear the gospel and desire to get saved, but not be convicted of their sinfulness that separates them from God. I thought about that a lot as a little child, and in the fall of 1962, I came to my mother and told her that I did not want to be separated from God. I did not want to go to hell. Like a little child, you should fear God: His wrath, His judgment, and separation from Him eternally!

Conversion—“give glory to Him”: The person who truly fears God will turn from his or her old ways and give Him glory; that is conversion. If you have never been saved from sin, you have

never been saved from hell. When the Israelites came out of Egypt they wanted a savior, not a Lord. So God destroyed them. There are groups of people in churches across this nation and around the world that want a savior, but not a Lord, and God will destroy them as well. If there is no genuine and lasting repentance, there is no conversion. If there is no conviction of sin, there is no conversion that gives Him glory—that is what the Scriptures teach.

Consecration—“worship Him”: This is the fruit of redemption. When we genuinely fear God, we are convicted of our sin, turn to the Savior, and give Him glory. That is the necessary total change of our lives—no longer giving ourselves glory, but Him. Although we will imperfectly do this, and fail at times, this is the longing of the heart of one who fears God. Then, when we consecrate our lives to worshiping Him, out of that worship will flow fruitful service.

God, in His infinite grace, will thus send forth a mighty angel—flying back and forth across the skies during the Tribulation—loudly proclaiming the gospel from one place to another, covering every nation and tribe, speaking in every language, so that no one at the coming judgment would be able to say he or she hadn’t heard. What a compassionate Savior!

FRIDAY: Jesus Offers Compassion in the Midst of Judgment

And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” Then a third angel [said] ... with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he ... shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night ...” (Revelation 14:8–11, emphasis added).

The passage above starts the second half of this chapter, in which we are confronted with what happens to those who exist without Jesus—eternal judgment and condemnation. But before I discuss the elements of doom that unbelievers will face, I want to further develop the first half of this fourteenth chapter, in which we see a revelation of Christ’s wonderful compassion.

In Revelation 14:1–7, we see Him standing with His servants trying to save those who will come to Him and listen to Him. The most often-noted emotion of Christ’s ministry was His compassion. Jesus was shown to be *“moved with compassion”* no less than thirteen times. (We all need a good dose of His compassion!) A great student of the life and ministry of Christ, the apostle Paul, said his ministry was motivated by Christ’s love. What did the compassion of Jesus look like? Let’s briefly examine the top ten groups of people who move Him to compassion:

- 1. Christ’s compassion is for the confused:** ... *He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd* (Matthew 9:36; see also Mark 6:34).

2. **Christ's compassion is for the sick and suffering:** ... *He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick* (Matthew 14:14).
3. **Christ's compassion is for the weak:** ... *"I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way"* (Matthew 15:32).
4. **Christ's compassion is for the desperate:** *"Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt"* (Matthew 18:27).
5. **Christ's compassion is for the persistent:** *So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him* (Matthew 20:34).
6. **Christ's compassion is for the helpless:** *Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed"* (Mark 1:41; see also Mark 9:22).
7. **Christ's compassion is for the hopeless:** ... *Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you"* (Mark 5:19).
8. **Christ's compassion is for the bereaved:** *When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep"* (Luke 7:13).
9. **Christ's compassion is for the misfortunate:** *"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion"* (Luke 10:33).
10. **Christ's compassion is for the repentant:** ... *But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him* (Luke 15:20).

Jesus was moved with compassion for the confused, the sick and suffering, the weak, the desperate, the persistent, the helpless, the hopeless, the bereaved, the misfortunate, and the repentant!

The Doom of Life without Jesus: When God speaks of Himself as being eternal (which He does eight times in Revelation), He uses the very same word for eternal that is used for the eternal duration of hell (three times in Revelation). So, according to God, it appears that hell lasts as long as He does—forever!

Apart from Jesus there is only hopeless and indescribable torment and judgment. The Word of God describes hell as a place of unending anguish. Jesus talked about hell more than heaven. Revelation 14:11 says that “*they have no rest day or night.*” Remember that Jesus talked about the bottomless pit and a lake of fire in which there is endless falling and no rest. There is no place to stand on to catch your breath—just endless torment.

It is not fashionable to talk about this today. A lot of the mainline denominations disavow hell; they say it is not Christian. It is more Christian than they understand, because Jesus is the One who describes it more than anyone else. The Word of God repeatedly describes hell as unending anguish: “*And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.*” ... *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire* (Isaiah 66:24; Matthew 3:12; see also Matthew 13:50; Mark 9:43–49; Jude 7).

But a note of hope sounds in verses 12–13 of Revelation 14 as the Holy Spirit speaks for the first time in Revelation; (the second and final time is in 22:17, with the last gospel invitation in God’s Word. *Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on’”* (Revelation 14:12–13).

“*The patience of the saints*” is a wonderful description of who Christians really are. “*The faith of Jesus*” means that if you have faith in Jesus Christ and keep His commands through the new birth (the regeneration of God who gives us the heart to obey Him), you are a saint. At the beginning of verse 13, John is commanded for the tenth time to write down the Word of God (see also 1:11, 19; chapters 2–3; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). We see here the last call to the earth as the angel is saying to preach the gospel. “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on*” is the second of the seven beatitudes in Revelation in which God bestows His blessings. Here is a summary of the Revelation beatitudes:

1. Blessed are readers, hearers, and keepers (1:3)—**this emphasizes the importance of the Word of God.**
2. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (14:13)—**this emphasizes the blessings of eternal life.**
3. Blessed are those watching and keeping their garments white (16:15)—**this emphasizes the Lord’s return.**
4. Blessed are those invited to the Lamb’s supper (19:9)—**this emphasizes the joy of Christ’s presence.**
5. Blessed are the participants of the first Resurrection (20:6)—**this emphasizes deliverance from death.**
6. Blessed are those heeding this book (22:7)—**this emphasizes obedience to the Word of God.**

7. Blessed are those with a clean robe and access to the tree of life (22:14)—**this emphasizes eternal sustenance.**

It is sad that so many today are departing from the doctrine of eternal punishment. For if they refuse to accept the gift of His grace, they must remain in their lost condition—eternally deserving, provoking, and receiving the holy wrath of God. I pray that you are among the saints who rest securely in Jesus as their eternal refuge rather than aligning yourself with those who scoff at the horrors to come!

SATURDAY: Jesus Offers Understanding in the Time of Wrath

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud. “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (Revelation 14:14–15, emphasis added).

The impenitent earth dwellers face only doom in their lives. They have told God to leave them alone, and so He will—forever: *These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power ...* (2 Thessalonians 1:9, emphasis added).

God responds to man's impenitence. The greatest illustration of this is seen in the actions of Judas. He was next to Jesus Christ for three and one-half years, and yet his heart was unmoved to confess his sin and turn to Christ for salvation. Amazingly, Judas saw no beauty in Christ after all he had witnessed in Him. In the end, caring only for gain, dominated only by self, he was ready to sell the Lord for the price of a slave. Judas is a picture of what we see going on in the world in Revelation 14, and God has to do something about it. As Ray Stedman has pointed out, God has three choices in the face of human rebellion:

- **One:** He can indulge it and allow it to go on forever. But in that case all the cruelty, injustice, hatred, pain, and death that now prevail on the earth will go on forever, too. God does not want that—and neither does man.
- **Two:** God can force man to obey and control the human race as if it were a race of robots. But to take away our free will would be to take away our capacity to give our love to God freely. Love cannot be forced.
- **Three:** This is God's only real choice. He must withdraw Himself from those who refuse His love. He must let them have their way forever. Since God is necessary to our existence, the decision to reject God is a decision to plunge ourselves into the most terrible sense of loneliness and isolation a human being can know.⁵

Ultimately, we choose whether God will judge us by deciding either to accept or refuse His grace, love, and forgiveness. As a result, we are choosing everlasting life or everlasting death.

Apart from Jesus there is no other future than verses 14–20 of Revelation 14—senseless and immeasurable warfare and bloodshed. In verse 20b, *the blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs*. To have blood for 1,600 furlongs (1 furlong = 607 feet) means 180 miles. From twenty miles beyond Armageddon, that would stretch to twenty miles past Bozrah, an ancient Edomite stronghold, that is twenty miles south-east of the bottom of the Dead Sea.

How to Develop Compassion as Christ's Servants: A good place to start is to follow the areas that John Ruskin, a famous poet and art critic, first pointed out as three keys to being a good artist. Enduring artists must possess: (1) **An eye to see** and appreciate all the beauty they wish to capture on the canvas; (2) **A heart to feel** and register within the picture the atmosphere and the beauty of the scene; and (3) **A hand to perform** by transforming a blank canvas into an image of what the eye has seen and the heart has felt. The skills that an enduring artist must follow are the same three skills a compassionate disciple of Jesus must learn.

This study of Revelation 14 will be meaningless if you don't see the compassion of Jesus. So prayerfully examine your life in light of the following challenges.

Do you have **an eye to see** how helpless our world is? There are six billion sheep, and most of them are without a true knowledge of the Good Shepherd. There were only 250 million in Christ's day. The population of our world is twenty-four times that today! What do *you* see in a crowd? A businessman sees a potential market, an educator sees a potential classroom, and a politician sees potential voters. Nearly everyone thinks in terms of personal benefit. But Jesus was moved with compassion at the sight of a crowd, and that compassion led Him to give His life on a cross of wood, writing a letter of love for the sins of the world.

Do you have **a heart to feel** how much the world needs Jesus? In the Bible, the word for compassion means "to suffer together with." This emotion of compassion constitutes a language that is understood universally. Compassion can be seen and felt by all because it is the language of the heart that needs no translation to be understood. In the twenty-first century, we have lost so much compassion in favor of instant gratification, and have a veneer-thin depth of commitment. The superficiality of emotional expression from TV has seeped into our spiritual lives. We are good actors, but often poor at feeling the pain of others. We need to ask God for a heart of compassion like Christ's—a heart that longs to see people come to Jesus!

Do you have **hands to perform** loving works in the name of Jesus? At the end of Revelation 14:13, it says, "*their works follow them*." Do you have good works that will follow you to heaven? What ministries are you involved in today that will touch the immortal souls of people for Jesus? Can you name one? Are your hands doing the work of Jesus? Do you share His Word? Do you reach out to point them to Christ? The fruits of such a ministry will follow you to heaven. Your house and car won't; your education and degrees won't; and your accomplishments and money won't. Are you investing your life with the compassion of Christ? If not, by His grace, start today!

Make a choice to live in hope. The most fulfilling and enduring hope you can ever have is to invest your life in others! Make a choice to live in hope by being a *vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work* (2 Timothy 2:21).

Week 35—Meditate on the Beauty of Jesus

(Revelation 15)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you meditate on the beauty of Jesus!



SUNDAY: Slowing Down to See Jesus

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! (Psalm 46:10, emphasis added).

To worship Him who is worthy of all worship and praise is our duty and purpose of existence. The Father seeks only one thing: worship. True worship is to ascribe to Christ the honor, praise, glory, and majesty that He is worthy of—His true “worthship.” Let us now peer through the door of heaven into the chambers of the Most High.

In Revelation 15, John, the heir of the apostolic band, tried to capture with his pen that which, when Paul saw it, was inexpressible. Through the eyes of that faithful and true disciple of love who alone remained, we get to listen to the choirs of angels in numberless circles about the glassy sea and its throne as they sing His worthy praise. We get to listen to those eternal creatures chant “*Holy, holy, holy.*” And by faith’s eye we get to see with John that band which no man could number—and listen to their songs of adoration and praise.

In Revelation 15 you will discover: Jesus Christ is patient (v. 1); Jesus Christ’s saints are triumphant (vv. 2–4); Jesus Christ is victorious (vv. 5–7); and Jesus Christ is wrathful (v. 8).

Do you know this Christ the Lord who merits such praise as “*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!*”? I exhort you to meditate on the beauty of Jesus: worship Him in the splendor of His redeeming love through His perfect patience, perfect holiness, perfect redemption, perfect justice (which has no mercy), and perfect wrath.

But to prepare each of our hearts for meditation truly worthy of the Lamb, we need to first slow down and reflect on the paradox of our time in history. For example, we have taller buildings, but

shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness.

We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry too quickly, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to life, not life to years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor. We've conquered outer space, but not inner space; we've done larger things, but not better things.

We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we've split the atom, but not our prejudice; we write more, but learn less; we plan more, but accomplish less.

We've learned to rush, but not to wait; we have higher incomes, but lower morals; we have more food, but less appeasement; we build more computers to hold more information to produce more copies than ever, but have less communication; we've become long on quantity, but short on quality.

These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion; tall men, and short character; steep profits, and shallow relationships. These are the times of relative world peace, but increased domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition.

These are days of two incomes, but more divorce; of fancier houses, but broken homes.

These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throw-away morality, one-night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer, to quiet, to kill.

It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring the universe to our screens but the God of the Universe can't bring us to our knees¹ So what is the personal solution to all this? Begin by asking the Lord to help you slow down so that you can truly meditate on the beauty of Jesus as we go through chapter 15 this week.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, please reveal areas in my own life where I need to slow down the pace and establish Your priorities instead of my own! As we look into this very special portion of Your Word, I ask for Your illuminating power to open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from Your Word! You have forever settled Your Word in heaven, and this chapter is but a glimpse of the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ! Thank You for each facet of His beauty and for every word that by Your Spirit You inspired Your servants to write. Your Word is so profitable and meant to guide us in the way of Christlikeness as we, Your servants, seek to follow You wherever You lead us.*

ever You go and serve You all our days. May this chapter encourage us to that end as we bow before You now. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

MONDAY: Jesus Christ Is Patient

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete (Revelation 15:1, emphasis added).

Learning how to slow down the pace of your life to establish God's priorities instead of your own is what patience is all about. Revelation 15 is a wonderful portion of God's Word to teach us about the patience we can have in Christ.

If you recall, the sixth seal commenced the Day of the Lord: "*For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?*" (Revelation 6:17). If you know anything about the Bible, you know that the Lord is dragging the final judgment out for as long as He can because of His patience and mercy. He has been withholding the final blow when He will melt all His enemies: ... *The LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths* (Zechariah 14:12).

God's patience goes way back, for Jesus has been patient for a very long time. Look at Jude 14–15: *Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, [for] ... their ungodly deeds ... against Him."* The Lord has been waiting since the time of Enoch to execute His judgment, but His patience will come to an end in Revelation 15:8.

Do you have genuine patience? Patience is the absence of personal irritation at the actions of others. Amazingly, Jesus never evidences personal irritations at ignominy and wickedness during the Tribulation hour. Instead, He patiently waits while sending wave after wave of witnesses and wave after wave of good news to the earth.

Patience is the "bearing long" with people that Paul spoke of in 1 Corinthians 13. Patience is also one of the supreme attributes of God. Revelation 15:1 is so critical because it talks about how Jesus is waiting. He is waiting with the plagues, and His wrath is going to be complete. But He has waited since Enoch, since Noah, since He came and walked this earth and was rejected; He has waited through all of the trumpets and the seals, and now He is waiting before He pours out those bowls—the final outflow of His wrath.

It is Christ's character to be gracious and longsuffering, and we should try to be like Him. Since Jesus can wait through all these terrible responses of humanity and keep pouring out His mercy on the earth, we ought to work on being patient in our own lives.

The supreme characteristic of God is His patience: "... *The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth ...*" (Exodus 34:6). Although God is patient, He does not forget unless we come and plead beneath the shadow of the blood

of Christ: "*The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty ...*" (Numbers 14:18).

Remember: through the pleadings of Abraham, God withheld the destruction of Sodom until a few people were rescued; God withheld the death angel's hand when David sacrificed and stopped the plague of God; and when Moses and Aaron interceded, and ran out with the censers, it stopped the plague that was going through Israel. God is so patient that He withholds His wrath in response.

God is patient, so He gives patience: *Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus ...* (Romans 15:5). To get along with fellow Christians pray: "God of patience and comfort, make me patient! I need Your comfort so that I will not respond adversely to frustrating situations." Do you know how powerful a church is when its members are patient with one another? One of the great marks of maturity is patience.

Throughout the Tribulation, Jesus Christ patiently offers His salvation: *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, ... but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9).

Ask yourself: *Am I more patient than I was three months ago, or less?* Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Are you letting the Holy Spirit bear that fruit in your life? Or are you spraying the fruit killer of impatience on it? If we are not increasing in patience, it is because we are not yielding and submitting to the Holy Spirit.

William Barclay has this to say about the meaning of patience, as used in 2 Peter 1:6: "The word never means the spirit which sits with folded hands and simply bears things. It is victorious endurance, masculine constancy under trial. It is Christian steadfastness, the brave and courageous acceptance of everything life can do to us, and the transmuting of even the worst into another step on the upward way. It is the courageous and triumphant ability to bear things, which enables a man to pass the breaking point and not to break, and always to greet the unseen with a cheer."²

Patience is a learned art, and sometimes we need to learn a lot in certain situations. We have to learn to allow the Spirit of God to bring this forth in our lives. The opposite of patience can be seen in the signs of anger: irritability, impatience, glaring eyes, raised voice, hurtful words, explosive actions, silent treatment, argumentative words, clenched teeth, and heavy breathing. This is not what God wants in us.

How can you stop impatient anger? Note these steps to resolving anger:

- Accept responsibility for anger and its symptoms.
- See your anger through the eyes of others.
- View anger as an alarm for unresolved guilt.
- Act quickly to resolve past guilt, offenses, failures, and bless the one making you impatient.
- Acknowledge the anger of forefathers.

- Regain the ground of past anger.
- Fully forgive the offender.
- Learn to see the benefits in tragedy.
- Exchange all personal rights to God.
- Establish daily accountability.

A word of caution: fueling your anger overnight gives place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27). The tormentors are the destructive emotions of fear, guilt, depression, anger, and anxiety. The way out is to confess specific sins (1 John 1:9); claim the blood of Christ (Revelation 12:11; Colossians 2:14–15); and ask God to restore the place surrendered to Satan. God promises that you can tear down Satan's strongholds with His truth (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).

The patience of Jesus is amazing—He waits so long. If it were up to us, we might have resorted to dealing with the world's rebellion with a few H-bombs! But Jesus just waits on the prayers of the saints, and then He waits still further for more prayers of the saints. Next, He allows the devil to start a shuttle service to heaven by killing so many people in the Tribulation that the martyrs will pile up in heaven. But that is really the beauty of this chapter as Jesus continues to show us His patience.

The lesson: We should act quickly to resolve our impatience and be wrapped in the beauty of Jesus!

TUESDAY: Jesus Christ's Saints Are Triumphant

And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God (Revelation 15:2, emphasis added).

Now I want to show you the triumph that the patience of Christ produces. *I saw something like a sea of glass* is not an actual sea of glass; it is *like* a sea of glass. I don't know what it is, and we shouldn't try to figure it out. But it is crystal clear, which is indicative of the holiness of God—nothing is hidden.

Mingled with fire (also seen in the river of fire flowing out from the throne) speaks of the fire of persecution and refinement through which these saints have gone. They *have the victory over the beast* and are now *standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God*. From a human perspective, all the people standing on the sea were simply killed, and that is the end of them. But Jesus said in Mark 8:35: "... Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

Satan will lose because these people will gain the triumph for Christ through martyrdom. Look at how many people Revelation 7:9–12 says are here: ... *I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number ... 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!" All the angels ... and the elders and the four living creatures ... 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."

This is the same group that we see in chapter 15—the martyrs of the Tribulation. Someone once asked me, “If a person takes the mark of the beast, can they go to heaven?” No, they cannot. But there will be a vast amount who will not take that mark. Do you know what the triumph of God is? Through the darkest hour of the earth, there will be the greatest revival the planet has ever known! An innumerable number of people will be saved in a very short period of time. Why? Jesus is patient. And when Jesus is patient, the saints will be triumphant as He conquers through them.

These martyrs will sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the glorious song of the Lamb (Revelation 15:3a). Don’t you think it fascinating that the first song mentioned in the Bible is in *Exodus 15*—and the final song of the Scriptures is in *Revelation 15*? Those two songs come together in this chapter because Exodus gives us “*the song of Moses*” and Revelation gives us “*the song of the Lamb*.” These two songs converge in Revelation 15:3–4.

The first song is a song of deliverance after the safe crossing of the Red Sea. Moses, through his sister Miriam, marvelously leads the nation of Israel in singing this song of triumph. Let’s look at some of its verses from Exodus 15:1–21 to see how greatly this song glorifies the Lord: *Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him"* (vv. 1–2).

Note that the Israelites gave the Lord alone the glory for the triumph over their enemies. The strength that leads to ultimate victory is in God, and not ourselves: “*Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*” (v. 11). In verse 21 we see Miriam then leading the women to echo what the men sang in verse 1: *And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"*

Songs of worship are to be about the Lord. The song of Moses and the song in Revelation 15 do not point at all to the singers. This is a good principle of what God expects in our worship. Today, many of our contemporary songs draw attention to the singers and to everything else but the Lord. I believe that points to one reason why the church is so weak globally—our worship is focused inwardly instead of outwardly on the Lord.

This song of Moses was stamped upon the memory of the Jews. It was sung at every Sabbath evening service in the synagogue. At every Jewish service the recital of the *Shema*, the creed of Israel, was (and still is) followed by two prayers, and one of these prayers refers to this song: “True it is that thou art Jehovah our God, and the God of our fathers, our King, and the King of our fathers, our Savior, and the Savior of our fathers, our Creator, the Rock of our Salvation,

our Help and our Deliverer. Thy name is from everlasting, and there is no God beside thee. A new song did they that were delivered sing to thy name by the seashore; together did all praise and own thee King, and say, Jehovah shall reign, World without end! Blessed be the LORD who saveth Israel.”³ I find it noteworthy that the lives of Moses and Christ parallel in these areas:

- Both were delivered in infancy from great danger.
- Both were named by God.
- Both were able to meet with God on the mountain—Moses on Mount Sinai and Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration.
- Both of them gave out the Word of God.
- Both were prophets to the people of God.
- Both were rejected by God’s people.
- Moses brought redemption from a temporary oppression in Egypt; Jesus brings redemption from the eternal penalty of sin.

It is no wonder then that the song in Revelation 15:3b-4, which is a lovely picture of Christ’s beautiful attributes, is very similar to the song of Moses. (We will go over this song in depth in tomorrow’s devotional.)

There is always a majestic backdrop to remind us of God’s unfailing purpose! What do I mean? There are eleven songs in Revelation that make up the background music to the story. They are songs of worship and triumph:

Revelation	Worship Theme	Worshippers
4:8	Holy, Holy, Holy	Living creatures
4:11	Worthy is the Creator	24 elders
5:8–10	Worthy is the Redeemer	Living creatures, 24 elders
5:11–12	Worthy is the Lamb	Creatures, elders, angels
5:13	Blessing and honor to the One on the throne	Every created being
7:9–10	Salvation belongs to God	A great multitude
7:11–12	Amen! Blessing and glory to our God forever	Angels
11:15	World’s kingdoms are now the Lord’s kingdoms	Loud voices
11:16–18	Thanksgiving to God	Elders
15:2–4	Great and marvelous God	Victors over the beast
19:1–8	Alleluias (4) for the marriage of the Lamb!	Great multitude, 24 elders, living creatures, great voices

The majestic declarations of God's glory and greatness in praise by the angels, Creation, the redeemed, and all of these together, show the constant backdrop for the shifting scenes in Revelation 15—worship.

Behind the shifting scenes of man's changing world of human history, portrayed by the symbols of Revelation, is an unchanging and vivid reality. In God's eternal world: God's purposes don't fail; God's plan doesn't change; God's Christ is always victorious!

WEDNESDAY: The Song of Jesus

"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" (Revelation 15:3b-4, emphasis added).

Revelation 15 contains the final song of the Scriptures. Both the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, which are very similar in content, capture well the beauty of Jesus.

Although these victorious martyrs will sing two songs, the song of the Lamb is a song which only they could learn: *They sang as it were a new song ...; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth* (Revelation 14:3).

These 144,000 who are with Christ will probably also know this song, will go out and share this message, and then their converts will sing it as well. We don't know what it is, but through the eyes of John we see them singing this song and then breaking forth into this beautifully combined song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

So here they are, these converts of the 144,000 Jewish missionaries, blessing the Lord! The song of Moses commemorated the greatest deliverance in the history of God's people, Israel; and the victorious martyrs, brought through the sea of persecution to the promised land of heaven, will sing that song of Moses. But the martyrs will also have their own special song. Their song is drawn from the Old Testament. Note the lines of the song and the Old Testament foundations:

- "Great and marvelous are Your works" (from Psalm 92, 111, 98 and 139).
- "Just and true are Your ways" (from Psalm 145:17).
- "Who shall not fear ... and glorify Your name" (from Psalm 86:9).
- "You alone are holy" (from 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 99:3; and Psalm 111:9).
- "All nations shall come and worship before You" (from Psalm 86:9).
- "For Your judgments have been manifested"—"The Lord has made known His salvation [victory]"—(from Psalm 98).

Do you see how this song is a complete recital of the Old Testament? Let us go through this special song of the Lamb and learn something that can affect our praise to God.

"Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!" This very unique title of God is only used in Revelation, and it appears five times. Because saints praise God's works, we are to worship His power, for God is omnipotent!

"Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!" Because saints praise God's ways, we are to worship His plan, and the way that plan unfolds. That is why we should be so thankful in our lives even for the unchangeable features: the family God put us in, the body He put us in, and the place in life He gave us. We should not chafe against that.

Are you following God's plan? Look at Revelation 14:4: ... *These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes* That includes the plan of God—they will follow God's plan; they will go the way God tells them to go. That is part of our worship; we are to worship God for His great hand leading us in our lives.

"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy." Because saints praise God's wonders, we are to worship His perfections. God is perfect, but we are not. We should thus say to Him: "God, You are perfect in Your knowledge, perfect in Your ways, perfect in Your Word that You have revealed to us—and I worship You!"

We can cultivate our worship as we look at the power of God, the ways of God, and the wonders of His plan. You will never be disappointed if you wait for God's perfect plan. God wants you to know His will more than you want to know it. It takes a long time to know His will because God is patient, and we are not. So God lets us chafe, fight, and struggle. Then when we don't know where to turn, we turn to Him and He shows us His plan as we let His Word dwell in us.

"For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested." Because saints praise God, we are to worship not only His plan but also His purposes. We are not going to be on earth when all this happens, but God is letting us know ahead of time what will occur. Why? So that we can marvel at how wonderful God is, and how He planned all this—and then tell others!

THURSDAY: Jesus Christ Is Victorious

... I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever (Revelation 15:5–7, emphasis added).

This passage in Revelation 15 speaks of Jesus Christ's coming triumph. What does *the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony* in verse 5 signify? The Old Testament states seven elements of the tabernacle.

Element One—The Way to the Presence of God: This is seen in the shekinah—God's sign of His glorious presence from Eden onward. (It is mentioned 100 times in Revelation.) Every time God came, there was the glory cloud: in the burning bush when Moses saw Him; in the

flaming cherubim as they kept Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden; over the completed tabernacle; over the completed temple; and leaving the temple in Ezekiel after the apostasy of Israel. That cloud is the sign of God's presence. The way into God's presence is through the tabernacle of the testimony.

Jesus is our Emmanuel, God with us: "... *The virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name 'Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us'*" (Matthew 1:23).

Element Two—The Way of Access to God: The purpose is to not just get into His presence, for God spoke in the tabernacle. Do you remember that in the Old Testament there would be a voice over the mercy seat speaking? God was accessible to the high priest and Moses: *Moses took his tent and pitched it ... far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. ... Everyone who sought the LORD went out to the tabernacle of meeting, which was outside the camp* (Exodus 33:7).

Jesus is the image of the invisible God: *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). Jesus declares God. When the tabernacle of the testimony is open it is a testimony of God's presence and His accessibility.

Element Three—The Way of Forgiveness with God: *"And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing..."* (Leviticus 5:5).

Jesus is our cleansing: *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin* (1 John 1:7). The tabernacle is open. Do you understand what is going on? We are at the high point of the Tribulation in Revelation 15—ready for the sickle to cut the grapes down and squash them. What does God do just before He does that? He opens the tabernacle and says, "I am accessible; My presence is open; My forgiveness is available." What a God of mercy we have!

Element Four—The Way of Guidance by God: *Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys* (Exodus 40:34–38).

Jesus wants to guide us: The tabernacle of the testimony opens in heaven and God is saying, "This is the way! Do you want out of this mess? Look up! Follow Me!" Of course, people won't, even though He continues to offer: "... *I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life*" (John 8:12).

Element Five—The Way of Protection from God: *Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ... They brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. And when the people ... arose ..., there was Dagon, fallen on its face ... before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. And ... the next morning, there was*

Dagon, fallen on its face ... before the ark of the Lord. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it (1 Samuel 5:1–4). The Philistines got the message that God's ark was the sign of God's protection of His people because He started smiting the Philistines wherever they took the ark.

Jesus promised us His care: “*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand*” (John 10:28). That is why we need to tell people how to get God's mark—the seal of the Holy Spirit—so that they are not eternally separated from God's presence.

Element Six—The Way of Cleansing with God: “*And he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the LORD for his sin And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him*” (Leviticus 19:21–22).

Jesus has opened the way for us: *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water* (Hebrews 10:22).

Element Seven—The Way of Blessings from God: “*... Delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father ...*” (Isaiah 58:14).

Jesus alone offers the overflowing life: “*... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). God says, “As long as you will come and worship Me at My tabernacle, I will rain My blessings on you—for I came to give you an abundant life. If you won't come, however, I will withhold those blessings” (see Zechariah 14:17).

The next verse, Revelation 15:6, can be summarized in three words—Jesus is holy: *And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.* These angels are dressed like Old Testament priests, which is symbolic of the holiness of Jesus.

The final verse of this passage, Revelation 15:7, can also be summarized in just three words—Jesus is eternal: *Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.* Jesus is God the Son—and He is eternal.

Do you know this holy, eternal Jesus? Are you worshiping Him in the beauty of holiness?

FRIDAY: Jesus Christ is Wrathful

The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (Revelation 15:8, emphasis added).

This is one of the saddest points in Scripture! At the end of Revelation 15, Christ has run out of patience. Thus, there is something new in verse 8. There has always been a glory cloud, but never smoke. Smoke showed up on Mount Sinai because the law speaks of judgment, but never

in the tabernacle or temple—except here, because God's mercy has ended. The smoke indicates that the way to the presence of God is now closed: the way of forgiveness, guidance, cleansing, and blessing is over, and no one henceforth can enter.

Some day soon it will be too late, just as it was in the days of Noah: *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth ... and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created ... both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them"* (Genesis 6:5–7).

The smoke in Revelation 15:8 portrays God's judgment. He is basically saying, as He did in Luke 12:20: "*Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?*" I pray that you will not be among those who hear Christ exclaim: "Fool!"—and face eternal separation from the One who created you, died for you, and yearns for you to be with Him forever!

For Christians, the greatest day of our lives will be the day when we stand alone in front of Jesus Christ and look up at Him, the One who will forever bear in His body the marks of the price of our redemption, and have Him assess our life publicly. Then we will await what we long for—His looking at us and saying: "*Well done, good and faithful servant!*"

Martin Luther, the great reformer, made a statement that I just can't get out of my mind: "I have but two dates on my calendar: today and the day of the judgment seat of Christ!" He said that was what kept him going on translating the Bible into the vernacular and the language of his people. And that is what inspired him to continue as he stood all alone against the whole religious world. Oh, how God has used him to actually alter the course of history from a human perspective. And all because he had just two dates on his calendar!

Is your life any more complicated than that? Do you want to accomplish something? Do you want to have a life like Martin Luther's that is still powerful after many years? Then live the simple life of two dates on your calendar: today, living for Jesus because you have a second date on your calendar—the day you are going to stand in front of Him.

Are you getting ready to appear at Christ's throne? When we take pilgrims to Greece, the most moving spot of all is in the city of ancient Corinth. I have seen travelers who were just "tourists" for the whole trip until they reached that spot. But there beneath the raised stone platform, called in Greek the *bema*, suddenly the awesomeness of the moment overtakes them and they see themselves at a future day standing before Christ's throne. Often tears, even deep silence, and always reverence, fill each one as the scene unfolds before their eyes.

Jesus said: "... *Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matthew 16:25). The real victory is not to prudently preserve our life as long as possible. Rather, as martyred Jim Elliott once said, we ought to "give what we cannot keep, to gain what we cannot lose."

SATURDAY: Resting in the Beauty of Jesus

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).

To worship is to change. Because heaven is the worship center of the universe, to get ready to appear before Christ's throne you need to learn to worship Jesus as He deserves. For worship and praise are our duty and purpose of existence. The Father therefore seeks that we ascribe to Christ the honor, praise, glory, and majesty of which He is worthy—His true "worthship." Just as worship begins in holy expectancy, true worship 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.

Understanding the nature of worship leads to very practical applications in our lives. For example, resentments cannot be held with the same tenacity when we enter into Christ's gracious light. As Jesus says, we need to leave our gift at the altar and go set the matter straight (Matthew 5:23–24). In worship an increased power steals its way into the heart sanctuary and an increased compassion grows in the soul.

Holy obedience saves worship from becoming an opiate, an escape from the pressing needs of modern life. Worship enables us to hear the call to serve clearly so that we respond, "*Here am I! Send me*" (see Isaiah 6:1–8).

Make a choice to live in hope. As you meditate on the beauty of Jesus—the splendor of His redeeming love shown through His perfect patience, holiness, redemption, justice, and wrath—you will find living hope that spills over into the worship that He longs for! In doing so, you can rest in His beauty that will fill your soul to overflowing and transform you by His power so that earth's dark shadows flee as you steadily gaze on Jesus, the brightness of the Father's glory!

I exhort you to meditate on the wonderful words of this old song, and then sing it worshipfully to your Lord!

Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting

*Jesus, I am resting, resting In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power Thou hast made me whole.*

*Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, I behold Thee as Thou art,
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless, Satisfies my heart—
Satisfies its deepest longings, Meets, supplies its every need,
And surrounds me with its blessings: Thine is love indeed!*

*Ever lift Thy face upon me As I work and wait for Thee;
Resting 'neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus, Earth's dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father's glory, Sunshine of my Father's face,
Keep me ever trusting, resting, Fill me with Thy grace.*

—Jean Sophia Pigott

Week 36—Rejoice That You Have Christ

(Revelation 16)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you rejoice that you have Christ!



SUNDAY: Life without Jesus

“Then He will also 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).

Have you ever wondered what the world would be like without Jesus? Perhaps you yourself are seeking, but haven't found. You are considering, but haven't decided. You are looking, but haven't placed your heart's desire on Jesus Christ and willfully chosen to follow Him. If that is your situation, pay close attention to the sixteenth chapter of Revelation, which shows what life without Jesus Christ would be like. It is the most graphic, vivid, powerful description in the Scriptures of what hell will be like. Life apart from Jesus Christ is nothing less than a living hell.

In the twenty-one dramatic verses of Revelation 16, John sees and records what happens when mankind joins the fallen angels in living without God. He wants us to see that the seven bowls of His wrath are the coming results for a world that rejects what Jesus alone can give them.

First Bowl: Human bodies will ooze malignant sores as all the evil within starts to come out—a sign of humanity's inward corruption apart from Christ's power.

Second Bowl: Earth's oceans will become death washing up on every shore. The waters of the sea filled with life will become a stench of dead blood—a sign of man's hopelessness apart from God.

Third Bowl: All water will have the stench of corruption rising from every river, stream, well, and faucet on the planet. All waters on earth will be poisoned—a sign of absolute desperation because water is as imperative as Jesus is.

Fourth Bowl: People's bodies will burn from a solar fire pouring down from the skies. The sun that keeps life sustained on earth will flare up to blaze and burn the planet—a sign of false worship that started with sun worship which is now powerless before the Creator.

Fifth Bowl: There will be an instantaneous impenetrable darkness. From the brightness of a fiercely blazing sun to absolute blackness in the realm of the beast—a sign of the spiritual darkness that Satan brings.

Sixth Bowl: The water of the great dividing Euphrates River will dry up. A demon trio will round up Antichrist's army to head for Armageddon. All the earth dwellers will seethe with rage toward God and hatred of their Creator—a sign that mankind will always fight against God unless the Holy Spirit brings them to a place of submission before the Father in heaven.

Seventh Bowl: As the earth dwellers gather, God unleashes the greatest earthquake of all time. More devastation occurs in that one earthquake than in all the others combined. All cities will be leveled; islands will sink, and hailstones weighing over sixty pounds will rain down upon planet Earth to obliterate all monuments and the men that built them. This is a sign of humanity's complete helplessness apart from God.

In the final days, mankind's unending fight with God will at last bring them the freedom they have always wanted—life without God. What does life become without God? That is what we will see as we go through the sixteenth chapter of Revelation. By this point in the Tribulation, the end has come. In a very brief span of time, the long-awaited moment has arrived. In seven swift strokes the desire of a world wanting no part of Jesus is granted. These seven bowls of plagues are for the lost; Revelation 16 is no less than a foretaste of hell. Think of how the earth dwellers will feel as they begin their inescapable plunge toward hell!

For the redeemed, however, the glory of Jesus shines from each plague. Jesus offers the ultimate security in contrast to the utter insecurity of the earth dwellers. Revelation 16 is an art gallery with seven divinely inspired portraits of Christ. Against the darkened screen of His wrath poured out upon sin are seven glowing pictures of Jesus:

- 1. Jesus has sanctifying power (vv. 1–2).** He is the One who cleanses and keeps (Jude 23–24). Have you let Him sanctify and clean you from the inside out? I am not talking about just turning over a new leaf, and making promises you can't keep, but letting Him thoroughly change you from the inside out. That is Christianity.
- 2. Jesus has life-giving power (v. 3).** He is the One who gives abundant life (John 10:10).
- 3. Jesus has satisfying power (vv. 4–7).** He is the One who promises that we will never thirst (John 7:37–39). Are you thirsting because of sin?
- 4. Jesus has liberating power (vv. 8–9).** He is the One who sets us free (John 8:31–36).
- 5. Jesus has enlightening power (vv. 10–11).** He is the One who gives us daily light and true spiritual sight (John 8:12; Acts 26:18).

6. **Jesus has conquering power (vv. 12–16).** He is the One who will always lead you into triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14).
7. **Jesus has securing power (vv. 17–21).** He is the One who gives you your ultimate eternal security (Romans 8:31–39; Hebrews 7).

Are you worshiping Jesus for His sanctifying and life-giving power? Have you been set free from sin? Do you let Jesus give you daily light in His Word? Are you following Him? Have you received His security through faith? I hope that you can answer each of these probing questions with a resounding “Yes!”

My Prayer for You This Week: *Dear Father, as we think about the last moments of human history, we are amazed to see repeated blasphemy and hardened hearts. It is blatant during the Tribulation, but more subdued in our present world. But those who have heard the good news of Jesus, and yet have rejected and hardened their hearts, are actually blaspheming You in the same way as these at the end of the Tribulation will do. We thank You that You so loved that You gave, and You gave so much that You emptied the very treasure of heaven—the Lord Jesus Christ sent to earth for sinful mankind. May we not simply read the gory details of this chapter, but see the marvelous power and beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. May the glory of what You are, and what You wish to accomplish in the lives of those who will respond to You, be very present in our hearts. Lord, we pray that we will see Your power and draw upon You by allowing Your Spirit to minister the power of Jesus in our lives. That is our heart's desire. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: Jesus Has Sanctifying and Life-Giving Power

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.” So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died (Revelation 16:1–3, emphasis added).

In this passage, we find that the world without Jesus is decaying and corrupting. Since Jesus is the One who cleanses and keeps, corruption and decay do not have to occur, for He ... is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ... (Jude 24). As the first bowl is released, look at what happens to those who have spurned Christ.

The First Bowl—Malignant Sores: This judgment reveals the horrors of locked hearts. As someone once said, “Perhaps the most terrible situation in life, is when Almighty God is powerless to gain an entry into the citadel of the human heart ... for God has given men the terrible responsibility of being able to lock their hearts against Him.”

In the first bowl, malignant sores will thus ooze out the unmitigated corruption, the filth of unrepentant souls (see also Exodus 15:26; 23:25; Deuteronomy 32:39). God will let everyone see on the outside what they are really like on the inside. This is the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy of Deuteronomy 28:27, 35: *“The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. ... The LORD will strike you ... from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.”*

Einstein once said, “It is easier to denature plutonium than to denature the evil spirit of man.” Judgment will not produce repentance because only God’s kindness does: ... *Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?* (Romans 2:4).

Jesus has sanctifying power. What is the lesson for the Christian in Revelation 16:1–2? Only Jesus has the power to cleanse us on the inside and keep us. At the end of verse two, those who have the mark of the beast will ooze corruption. In contrast, out of those who have the seal of the Holy Spirit will flow love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

The Second Bowl—The Sea of Death: This sea of death in Revelation 6:3 will affect the world’s food chains and hydrological cycle. From time to time, off the coast of California and elsewhere, a phenomenon known as “the red tide” occurs. These red tides kill millions of fish, and poison those who eat contaminated shellfish. In 1998, one of these red tides hit Hong Kong. First the water turned yellow, but by midsummer it was thick and viscous with countless billions of dinoflagellates, tiny one-celled organisms. Miles of stinking fish fouled the beaches. Much marine life was wiped out, even bait used by fishermen died upon the hooks. Eventually the red tide subsided, only to appear again the following year. Eating fish contaminated by the tide produced severe symptoms caused by a potent nerve poison. An unchecked population explosion of toxic dinoflagellates would kill all the fish in the sea. The phenomenon is well known, but scientists do not know what causes the proliferation of these creatures or what normally limits it. This may not fully explain what will happen when the second vial is outpoured, but it certainly illustrates it.¹

Right now, even without God’s intervention, the mechanism is present on earth to kill everything in the oceans.

Jesus has life-giving power. As the Creator, He is the One who has the power to say, “Fear not!” Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, says in John 10:10: *“... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”* Christianity (being born again and receiving Jesus Christ) is no less than abundant life. It is an utter internal transformation from the inside out and produces life *“more abundantly”*—it just overflows.

In Revelation 16:3 we see that without Jesus there is death and hopelessness, but with Jesus we have life-giving power from the One who gives abundant life. Those who come to Christ live according to the power of an endless life. No death ... no decay ... no destruction ... no lifelessness.

TUESDAY: Jesus Has Satisfying Power

Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “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.” And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments” (Revelation 16:4–7, emphasis added).

Have you ever given thought to how important water is, and what will happen when every drop of water on the planet turns to blood?

Water is the wonder fluid; for a brew that is colorless, tasteless, odorless, and calorie free, water packs a punch. It is the only substance necessary to all life. Many organisms can live without oxygen, but none we know of can live without water. Life, and life to come, can both be reduced to a simple common denominator: no known life-form on earth can exist without water. And no life-form will ever be able to exist in eternity without Jesus, the Water of Life.

Water comes closest to being the universal solvent. While you drink from a tumbler, the water is busily dissolving molecules from your glass. It travels upward in defiance of gravity. So strongly do water molecules adhere to one another that when one evaporates from the leaf of a tree, it pulls up those behind, like links of a chain. This molecular attraction forms the surface film on which water bugs race without wetting their feet, and which permits you to float a darning needle atop a glass of water. The average American uses eighty-seven gallons a day to drink, flush, and shower. One hundred twenty gallons are needed to produce one hen's egg, and thirty-five hundred gallons per steak. With these indirect uses, our daily need soars to some two thousand gallons each. Four trillion gallons of precipitation falls on the United States each day, yet we use a mere tenth of it. None is lost: the water that John used for baptizing Jesus still exists—its billions of molecules are now dispersed around the world.

God gives an unbelieving world a graphic picture. No water—no life. Why? To portray the spiritual truth that only Jesus satisfies; only He can give the Water of Life! To not thirst can only mean that we come to Him. For that reason, Revelation ends with a call—the last gospel invitation. The Bible begins with God seeking us and it ends the same way: ... *Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (Revelation 22:17).

The Third Bowl—Poisoned Waters: God is saying to a world that is plunging toward destruction: “Have you in your heart experienced the thirst that comes without Christ? Have

you come to the place where you desire to have Him? Then take Christ, the Water of Life, freely!" And to the very end of the Scriptures God offers salvation. Yet, even in churches today, there are some who have never said yes to Jesus Christ and submitted to Him. They have not acknowledged that they are lost apart from Him and are thus without hope.

Hell is a place where people will have eternally unsatisfied desires for drugs, alcohol, and sex. However, those desires will be multiplied without the means to satisfy them. They will live forever in the blackness of darkness, in a bottomless pit, suffering fire with those desires just eating them up from the inside out. This is the unending consuming worm of hell—the lusts accumulated over a lifetime.

Only Jesus Christ can satisfy your righteous desires or take away the wrong ones to replace them with a spring of fresh water so that you no longer desire the saltwater of this world: *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God ...* (Psalm 42:2). Only Jesus can satisfy your soul; only God can quench your thirst.

Each day the sun evaporates a trillion tons of water from the oceans and continents and pumps it as vapor into the atmosphere—the greatest physical force at work on earth. Each day the same amount of vapor condenses and falls as rain, snow, sleet, and hail, replenishing its sources. But this is no natural lack of water; we cause our own thirst by our sin.

Jesus has satisfying power. In Revelation 16:4–7 we see that life without Jesus is endless thirst, but Jesus has the power to satisfy us so that we will never thirst: ... “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:37–38).

I am reminded of the fastest-growing segment of cyberspace: the thirst-inducing segment. Did you know that lust and all the accompanying products that develop lust in human beings (as in pornography and all its deviances) is like a thirsting person in the desert drinking saltwater, hoping to stop their thirst? The more they drink, the thirstier they are; it is a self-destructive pattern. Jesus says, “If you are not in Me, you will have nothing but endless thirst.” In Christ, we will be constantly satisfied by Jesus and never experience such endless thirst.

WEDNESDAY: Jesus Has Liberating Power

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, emphasis added).

The last words of the Old Testament pronounce a doom upon those who won't allow Jesus to be their Sun of Righteousness: “*For behold, the day is coming, ... and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,*” says the LORD of hosts, “*that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings ...*” (Malachi 4:1–2).

Jesus is either the Sun of Righteousness who heals you—or the One who will burn you to stubble. The choice is yours. What is your response to Jesus Christ? Have you come to Him to heal your sin-sick soul and to give you eternal life? Or are you turning away from Him and willingly hardening your heart by locking its door to keep Jesus out (Revelation 3:20)? He will consume you if you do, and you will experience a foretaste of it in the emptiness of life right now.

The Fourth Bowl—The Ultimate Sunburn: Every year, around a million people are diagnosed with skin cancer in America, most of which is caused from an overexposure to the sun's rays. Yet people still lay out in the sun. Similarly, when God causes a solar fire to scorch all the earth dwellers, they will stubbornly face the sun's heat rather than repent. So they will curse Almighty God instead.

Listen to what John Phillips has to say in *Exploring Revelation* about Revelation 16:8–9: "The sun, in its normal state, pours out a continuous stream of high-energy particles which race toward the Earth at a peak speed of three million miles an hour. The earth is surrounded by a field of radiation, the magnetosphere, which protects it from full exposure to this deadly assault.

"God who created the sun and the Lord Jesus who lit that solar furnace will turn the thermostat up during this time of the Tribulation. Everyone will find that the earth is a prison house and they are going to be trapped. This will be much like when irresponsible parents leave their child locked in the car and the heat inside builds up and incapacitates or even kills the child. God is going to let this planet become a locked prison house and it is going to get hotter and hotter until people are scorched."²

So Jesus, who can free men from doom and liberate them from damnation, will *still* be rejected. What a contrast of choices—to be burned up or blessed beyond description! Have you made your choice?

Jesus has liberating power. Without Jesus, life on earth is a burning prison house (Revelation 16:8–9). But He has the power to set the prisoner free, and "*If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*" (John 8:36; see also 8:31–35). This is what is wonderful about Christ—He liberates us and breaks the power of sin. However, the world doesn't want Jesus, and so they are imprisoned.

To all who look to Him, Jesus is liberator in three powerful ways: (1) He leads us in triumph (2 Corinthians 2:14); (2) He crucifies our flesh so that we can die daily to self (Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 15:31); and (3) He washes (KJV) and releases (NASB) us from our sins (Revelation 1:5). Are you in the triumphal procession? Are you dying daily to your flesh? When you fall, do you let Him wash you?

THURSDAY: Jesus Has Enlightening Power

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds (Revelation 16:10–11, emphasis added).

The next plague is strikingly similar to the ninth plague upon Egypt in Exodus 10:21–29. They will taste the blackness of hell forever. There is one thing that people don't realize about hell: it is not only fire but also dark fire—it is blackness of darkness. Many times when I preached in the bar districts of southern mill towns, those men would tell me that they would be with their friends in hell. I told them that they would not see their friends there. It will be blackness of darkness: the ultimate loneliness, forever falling in the bottomless pit, with black fire consuming you on the inside and outside.

The Fifth Bowl—Utter Darkness: The bowls will be poured out over a very quick period of time, maybe a month or less. Here, people will still have their sores from the first bowl, and they can smell the dead fish and sea creatures from the oceans and waterways. When they run water to wash off their sores, they will find blood coming out of their faucets. And while they deal with that, the blazing heat will come. And now they will experience absolute darkness and pain.

According to Ray Stedman, the scope of this bowl of judgment is limited to the realm of the beast—or the revived Roman Empire of Western Europe. This judgment involves a great part of the earth, causing a sudden and unexplainable darkness to fall. Steadman writes:

This is not the first time such a phenomenon has occurred. In the middle of the day on May 19, 1780, the entire region of New England was covered by darkness—a day which has become fixed in New England history as The Dark Day. The mysterious blackout lasted for several hours.

In the early afternoon of March 19, 1886, a similar zone of darkness moved across central Wisconsin, causing the sky to turn from a bright cloud-dappled blue to midnight black in the space of about a minute. This darkness blanketed several villages and towns to the west of Lake Winnebago and lasted about ten minutes. Similar unexplained occurrences of sudden darkness have occurred in Memphis, Tennessee (December 1904), Louisville, Kentucky (March 1911), and other places and times in the United States and around the world. All of these events have two things in common: (1) no one was ever able to explain these events in terms of a known phenomenon such as an eclipse, and (2) most of the people who experienced these events were filled with terror, believing the end of the world had come.

The events in the sky or beyond the sky, which caused these midday nightfall's, might have been the same as that which caused three hours of darkness during the crucifixion of Christ.³

In all these earlier events of unexplained darkness, most of the people believed that the end of the world was upon them. They soon discovered that was not true, but when the fifth bowl is poured out, there will be no doubt in the minds of the earth dwellers that the end has indeed come—and yet they still will not repent. Note three penetrating truths:

1. **Closed hearts face judgment.** Those who would not embrace the true Light of the World will now face the horrors of absolute darkness. But those who would embrace the true Light of the World—trusting, embracing, and receiving Christ as the Light of Salvation—will never be in impenetrable darkness!
2. **The most horrible judgment is the blackness of darkness in hell.** Jesus stands in the way and only you can turn Him down or take Him in.
3. **Jesus is light and salvation.** Do you seek His light? Do you walk in His light?

I can't emphasize this enough: the most horrible judgment of all is associated with the hopelessness that the blackness of darkness brings. Egypt's plagues parallel the final judgment of God: the death angel came after the blackness (Exodus 10:21–29; see also Joel 2:2, 10; Amos 5:18, 20; Zephaniah 1:15). Jesus warned of the ultimate judgment, and that the plagues on Egypt (Exodus) and the day of the Lord (Revelation 6–19) were only a foretaste of the horrors to come (see Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:15; 24:29, 50; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 13). Where is the hope in all this?

Jesus has enlightening power. Since closed hearts face judgment, hope is found by opening your heart to Christ. In Revelation 16:10–11, we see that Jesus has the power to give daily light and true spiritual sight (John 8:12; Acts 26:18). Because judgment in hell is blackest darkness, you can choose to avoid it by meeting and embracing Jesus, who is light and salvation.

Without Jesus there is impenetrable darkness. Because "*men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*" (John 3:19), God now lets the world experience what they want. The impenetrable darkness causes them to chew and gnaw on their own tongues. They are in such pain that they can do nothing but inflict more pain on themselves because of the horror.

With Jesus, there is endless enlightening power from the One who gives us daily light and true spiritual sight. In Acts 26:17–18, Jesus said in His appearance to Saul (Paul): "*I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.*" That is the power of Jesus!

In light of all this, and the terrifying results if you make the wrong choice, I exhort you to prayerfully examine yourself to see if you have really opened your heart's door to Christ!

FRIDAY: Jesus Has Conquering Power

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of

demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon (Revelation 16:12–16, emphasis added).

The Sixth Bowl—Called to Armageddon: The time has come for the fighting of that final war of the age, the name of which has become a byword among men since John first wrote it down—Armageddon! God has chosen the Holy Land as the stage upon which two crucial events take place, one on a mountain, and one on a plain. Mount Calvary and the Plain of Megiddo are the two altars of sacrifice that dominate the history of the world.⁴

What is the location of the battle? Dr. Herman Hoyt describes the location as follows: “The staggering dimensions of this conflict can scarcely be conceived by man. The battlefield will stretch from Megiddo on the north (Zech. 12:11; Revelation 16:16) to Edom on the south (Is. 34:5, 6; 63:1), a distance of sixteen hundred furlongs—approximately two hundred miles. It will reach from the Mediterranean Sea on the west to the hills of Moab on the east, a distance of almost one hundred miles. It will include the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2, 12) and the Plains of Esdraelon. At the center of the entire area will be the city of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1, 2). Into this area the multiplied millions of men, doubtless approaching 400 million, will be crowded for the final holocaust of humanity. The kings with their armies will come from the north and the south, from the east and from the west. ... In the most dramatic sense this will be the ‘Valley of decision’ for humanity (Joel 3:14) and the great winepress into which will be poured the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God (Revelation 19:15).”⁵

What will draw all the nations of the world into the area of Armageddon? They will gather themselves there for perhaps various reasons. It would seem that the following are of the more important reasons.

The Sovereignty of God: In at least five distinct passages, we are told that God Himself will gather the nations here: Isaiah 34:2; Joel 3:2; Zechariah 14:2; Zephaniah 3:8; and Revelation 16:16 (because of the deception of Satan [Revelation 16:13–14]).

Three special unclean spirits will trick the nations into gathering at Armageddon because of their devilish hatred of Christ (Psalm 2:1–3; Revelation 11:18). The nations, led by Antichrist, will doubtless realize the imminent return of Christ (Revelation 11:15; 12:12). They will also be aware of His touching down on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9–12). Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that they will gather in that area to destroy Him at the moment of His return to earth!

The Destruction of Jerusalem: Their end is **inescapable**. Their defeat is **ultimate**. Our King is **unconquerable**. Perhaps the saddest event during the Tribulation will be the siege and destruction of the Holy City. This will be the forty-seventh and last takeover of the beloved city of David. Consider what Jesus said in Luke 21:20: “*But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near*” (see also Zechariah 12:2 and 14:2). Christ saw a near and far fulfillment in this verse. In A.D. 70 the early church remembered this verse and fled

to Pella so that none were trapped in the city. But Matthew 24 shows that Christ's words stretch far beyond this to the final siege and attack of God's chosen people of promise—the Jews. When these two events transpire, both the angels in paradise and the demons in perdition will surely hold their breath.

Jesus has conquering power. In Revelation 16:12–16, we see that without Jesus there is only enslavement to demon masters because these demons trick and lure people. The Scriptures say that all idols are demons. I find it very interesting that there are not many world religions—only many facets of Satan's kingdom. Every false religion in the world has demons behind it. There is only ONE revelation of the truth of Jesus Christ: everything else (even the ones who smile on TV and are family friendly) are inspired by demons. Only Jesus has the conquering power to always lead us into triumph (2 Corinthians. 2:14). The way for someone to keep from getting the mark of the beast is to be sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Are you experiencing the triumph of Christ? When I take groups to the Holy Land and we go to the Plain of Megiddo, I always say the same thing: "Most of you who are here will probably never come back again on a bus. But all of you are going to come back on a horse." The Scriptures say that the whole world will converge there. The earth dwellers, following their demon masters, will surround Jerusalem from Megiddo all the way past Jerusalem down into the region below the Dead Sea. Those hundreds of millions of people will try to fight against God; and at that climactic moment the sky will split and the King of Kings—Jesus Christ—will come on a white horse! And all of us will be coming behind Him flying through the air! You and I will have an aerial view, coming in behind the greatest leader of all time, the great tour guide, Jesus Christ Himself, as He comes down to speak a word and incinerate that army of hundreds of millions.

Zechariah 12:10 tells us exactly what will happen: *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."*

Zechariah 14:12–13 says that He is coming though the air and, as He comes, He will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is the Second Coming proper. The mount then splits in two: *And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet [they start melting], their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues [speaking blasphemous things against God] shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the LORD will be among them*

Christians, however, are more than conquerors! Remember: we are assured of victory in Jesus who always leads us in triumph in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14). So in verses 12–16 of Revelation 16, Jesus has conquering power as the One who always leads us into triumph.

What kind of response should we have to this truth? We need to establish the right priorities—God's! For God offers us an unshakable kingdom (Hebrews 12:25–29). So don't put your treasures where they are going to be destroyed, because Jesus has called us to have an unwavering focus (2 Peter 3:10–18).

The end is coming. The world is going to fall apart. Mankind and life as we now know it will soon cease to exist. So what does God want now that we are listening to His Revelation? He wants us to worship His Son!

SATURDAY: Jesus Has Securing Power

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great (Revelation 16:17–21, emphasis added).

Against the rumble of the seventh bowl's massive quake comes the final glorious portrait of Christ!

The Seventh Bowl—A Massive Earthquake: As we study this mega-quake, the “Big One” that has long been feared, allow yourself to hold on to the immense and powerful security we have in Christ.

The judgments of Revelation 16:17–21 I take to be literal. What is described here is very possible with today's weapons. Other than the hail and lightning, the same effects would result from both hydrogen and plutonium bombs. Consider what Lehman Strauss has to say about this:

“It is done!” Here is the perfecting of the judgments, the consummation of God's wrath, the final overthrow of all opposition. Once before our Lord uttered similar words from the cross when He cried, “It is finished” (John 19:30), and at the time there was an earthquake (Matthew 27:51). But then He was bearing the judgment for man's sin. However, the next time He speaks of a finished work, it will be the consummation of judgment upon all who have rejected Him.

The seventh angel tips the seventh bowl of judgment in “the air,” the present headquarters of Satan (Ephesians 2:2), followed by thunders, lightning, and hailstones weighing upwards to one hundred pounds. This is the final destruction of every religious, political, and educational institution that man has built apart from God. It is the collapse of all man's hopes and dreams. But with all of this, men still refuse to submit to God's rule. All that men consider stable, they must watch crumble. Many people marvel at such descriptions of the severity of God. I marvel at the unconcern and wickedness of men's hearts.⁶

Have you ever looked at a map of the fault lines of the earth? Like an egg, God has cracked the earth just right for this moment. Note where they run: from Alaska to Chile, from Siberia to New Zealand, from the southern Mediterranean fanning out across the Mideast and then across Asia and south to the heart of Africa. When those tectonic plates move in one quake, the power of 20,000 nuclear bombs is unleashed. On December 26, 2004, the resultant tsunami from just one quake killed 150,000-plus souls. And in Pakistan and India, over 70,000 lost their lives in a quake in the fall of 2005. With more far-reaching devastation than that ahead, our ultimate security can only be found in Jesus.

Jesus has securing power. In verses 17–21 of Revelation 16, we see that without Jesus there can only be hopeless destruction. As the world converges on Jerusalem in Satan's last effort to destroy the Jews, God will convulse the earth and obliterate them with hailstones. But with Jesus there is securing power from the One who gives us our ultimate eternal security (Romans 8:31–39; Hebrews 7).

On Mount Calvary, grace redeemed the world by the sacrifice of God's Son. On the plains of Megiddo vengeance offers up the armies of the world in a sacrifice of doom. Both are blood baths; both are the descent of wrath upon sin. And both are brought about by God's bitterest foes who, in spite of themselves, work out God's perfect and sovereign will. Across both Mount Calvary and the plains of Megiddo can be written the words of Peter: "*The Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done*" (Acts 4:27–28). From each of these bloodbaths proceeds a supper: one a feast of remembrance for the people of God, and the other a feast of retribution for the carrion.

Make a choice to live in hope. At Calvary there rang up to the gates of heaven a victorious cry, "*It is finished!*" And at Armageddon there rings down to earth an answering cry from the temple gates in glory, "*It is done!*"

Both events shake the earth—the quake of Matthew 27:51–54 at Christ's Resurrection and here in Revelation 16:18, the greatest quake of all time. Both events attack and conquer Satan's domain. At Christ's death the graves opened and saints were raised from death (contrary to Satan's power); in Revelation 16 the seven bowls will be poured out on the air—the present headquarters of Satan.

Both events represent a path: which are you on? One leads to the enduring hope of eternal bliss in the presence of your glorious Savior, Jesus Christ. The other leads to utter hopelessness and devastation with the ultimate destiny of eternal suffering in hell with the devil and his fallen angels—forever separated from the God who loved you and gave Himself for you.

Jesus has sanctifying, life-giving, satisfying, liberating, enlightening, conquering, and securing power. Faith in this beautiful Jesus is the victory that overcomes the world! So rejoice if you have Christ—and sing this wonderful old song with joy in your heart to Him!

Faith Is the Victory

*Encamped along the hills of light, Ye Christian soldiers rise,
And press the battle ere the night Shall veil the glowing skies.
Against the foe in vales below, Let all our strength be hurled;
Faith is the victory, we know, That overcomes the world.*

*His banner over us is love, Our sword the Word of God;
We tread the road the saints above With shouts of triumph trod.
By faith they, like a whirlwind's breath, Swept on o'er every field;
The faith by which they conquered death Is still our shining shield.*

*To him who overcomes the foe White raiment shall be giv'n;
Before the angels he shall know His name confessed in heav'n.
Then onward from the hills of light, Our hearts with love aflame;
We'll vanquish all the hosts of night, In Jesus' conq'ring name.*

Refrain:

*Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory!
O glorious victory, That overcomes the world.*

—John H. Yates, 1837–1900

Week 37—Understand the True Bride of Jesus

(Revelation 17)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you understand the true bride of Jesus!



SUNDAY: The True Bride of Jesus

I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2, emphasis added).

In Revelation 17 we find the collapse of the apostate world's church. In the process we see Satan's harlot bride: the delusion of religion. From Eden onward, Satan has been building his church. Although Eve was tempted and fell into sin, she never joined the old serpent's assembly. Cain was Satan's first member (1 John 3:12), and that church has flourished ever since.

Today the church of Satan has many congregations. Whenever the God of Scripture is left out, there is only one other source of authority—Satan. Some followers meet in the ivory towers of academia where God is banished from education. Other congregations include those masses who ignore God altogether, and some even worship Satan directly. But the most insidious congregations meet in churches, synagogues, mosques, cathedrals, and temples where organized religion stresses the achievements of humans working their way to God. This "church of good works" promotes self-righteousness: "I will do it my way." When you join such a church, you are required to "follow the rules"—and hope that the good outweighs the bad in the balance of religions. This religion deceives mankind into thinking that there are many ways to God, and many gods to seek. Refusing to acknowledge that they were created in God's image, these followers create their god in their *own* image instead.

In the seventeenth chapter we see Satan's ongoing system of counterfeiting the true church, the true worship, and the true seeking of God. Revelation 17 can therefore be divided into these

sections: Satan's plan **exposed** (vv. 1–6); Satan's plan **explained** (vv. 7–15); and Satan's plan **extinguished** (vv. 16–18).

To pass off counterfeit money, I would not show you a blue twenty-dollar bill, because right away you could tell it is a fake. The best way to fool someone is to choose currency that looks as much like the genuine article as possible. Most who talk and think about Satan's church think of warlocks, witches, and human sacrifices. But I don't think he spends much time on that. His goal is not to make a "blue twenty-dollar bill" but to make one that looks exactly like the real thing. Therefore, Satan slyly represents the real thing as closely as possible while still having a deadly difference that is damnable. So when you think of Satan's church, don't be tricked into assuming that it simply involves Buddha, animists, and stone gods in the jungle. No, his church will also have Christ, the Bible, and words that are familiar to Christians. The deadly difference that is damnable is that the reality of the substitutionary work of Christ, and the essence of the gospel of grace, will be missing. That is Satan's counterfeit church.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost and make them His bride. He gave Himself to purchase her from sin and damnation. Jesus ever lives as a Great High Priest to purify and cleanse His bride from all defilement. The true bride of Jesus is a pure and chaste virgin, washed in the blood of the Lamb, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and awaiting the day of marriage to Jesus.

Satan also has a bride. We meet her in Revelation 17. She is a drunken, licentious harlot. She is the full-grown woman of the Tower of Babel. She is the queen of heaven of the Old Testament. She is the mystery religion in the cults of the Near and Far East. She is the one-world church of the World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches of America. Nothing is more satanic and deceptive in the entire world than the ecumenical (one united) church movement. God hates religious deception! She is also the embodiment of a false Christianity, led by a false Christ and embodied in the image of the very mother of Jesus. That is why John was so shocked. No other beast in sixteen chapters of death, demonism, and destruction shocked him until he saw this false harlot bride.

As we start this difficult topic that is so crucial to the future, please pray that God will open your understanding about the end of days.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Dear heavenly Father, bless us with Your enlightening power. Open our eyes to behold wonderful truths from Your Word. May the humility of Christ, the insights of Your Spirit, and Your blessed plan be present in our lives. As we increase in knowledge, may we not become puffed up with pride, but rather humbly receive Your engrafted Word that we may grow in Christlikeness. We pray that in Jesus' name and love we will go out to reach the world around us—the world that is dying without hope of the Savior. Help us to be constantly ready to step heavenward, and to know less of this world as our home and be more expectant of heaven. We pray all this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.*

MONDAY: Satan's Plan Exposed

And no wonder! For Satan ... transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14, emphasis added).

The seventeenth chapter of Revelation describes the doom of the Babylonian system. This system is seen as a woman portrayed as a harlot. She seems to be a symbol of Satan's world religion. This chapter records the demise of the counterfeit church Satan founded at Eden—the one he has worked on ceaselessly ever since. The beast (Satan's incarnation as a false Jesus) finally destroys the apostate church and sets up unhindered satanic worship (via the beast and false prophet's work). To make this happen, Satan's ultimate goals in the world today are to forge global unity politically, religiously, and financially.

In Revelation 17, as God's Word unmasks the apostasy of false religions, we discover the true bride of Jesus. God reveals that the true bride is made up of His own saints who are "*called, chosen, and faithful*" (17:14). They are Christians who are called by God to salvation, chosen by God because He placed His love on us, and faithful to the One who called us. What a beautiful description of the church!

There is a very significant contrast between the two women of Revelation: God's saints are seen in Revelation 12 and Satan's church is revealed in Revelation 17. God's way is a narrow path, but Satan's way is a broad path. Yet both are seemingly headed in the same direction. God's way is narrow and straight—it is a hard path and few find it (Matthew 7:13–14). However, Satan's way is broad, and the path is easy and level. In fact, the devil gives you a nice little slant so you can coast along. In contrast, God's path is slanted upward, and it is difficult to climb.

God's way is exclusive, which is what bothers people so much. In fact, in a United Nations forum on global religion, the members discussed the bothersome exclusiveness of Christianity. In San Francisco there is now a group seeking to unite all the religions of the world. As they see it, a hindrance to such unity is the small part of religion in Christianity that they call "exclusive"—those who are devoutly committed to following God and His Word. The Bible, God, and His church with its so-called exclusiveness are thus continually attacked; satanic inclusiveness—where anybody can believe anything and go Satan's way—is lauded.

God's way is the true church; Satan's way is the false church. God has a true bride; Satan has a false bride. God says there is no other name under heaven whereby you must be saved. Satan says the way is ecumenical: Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses believe in one god, so that is good; Hindus, down deep, don't believe in one god, but they believe in truth, so they are also good. They find a way for every belief to fit in, and that is called ecumenical inclusivism.

God says there is one way; Satan says there are many ways. God says that we are to look for a heavenly destination; most satanic, ecumenical religions put their focus on the earth. It is an earthly way, and most of the people in these religions are involved in preserving and worshiping the planet Earth.

God's way is Jerusalem; Satan's way is Babylon. God's way is the city of peace; Satan's way is the city of confusion.

God speaks in spiritual terms; Satan speaks in fleshly terms. God talks about an internal transformation; Satan talks about an external reformation. God is the God of Creation since He initiates; Satan is the god of evolution as things just somehow happen. God is a God of love; Satan is a god of hate.

In God we have spiritual worship that is invisible; no images are involved. Satan is always associated with idolatry. Look at even the self-professed, not-idolatrous Muslims: how do they worship? At the Kabala they worship massed around a black stone in Mecca. Spiritual worship is at the heart of God's true church; idolatry is at the heart of all earthly religions.

God's way is divine; Satan's way is humanistic. God's way leads to contentment; Satan's way always leads to covetousness. God's way is appropriated by faith; Satan's way is merely intellectually appropriated.

God's way is through the Spirit; Satan's way is through religious rituals and works. God's way put Christ on a cross of shame; Satan's way puts a crown of pride on men. God's way is a pure bride; Satan's way is a wicked, unfaithful, impure harlot.

Which way have you been following?

TUESDAY: Satan's Plan Explained

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, emphasis added).

Revelation 17 records the demise of Satan's church. He began building his church in the Garden of Eden in anticipation of the moment when he can install his false Christ at the head of it. At that time he will destroy the scaffolding that built the church. That is why there is going to be a complete break with organized religion sometime in the Tribulation. The most likely time is when the image is placed in the temple of the Jews. All the earth dwellers who were never converted (those never born again) are going to be shocked when the woman portrayed as a harlot is destroyed and the beast installs himself as Christ and demands to be worshiped. Basically, *the beast is Satan's incarnation as the false Jesus*.

Satan's ultimate goals in the world today are to forge global unity politically, religiously and financially. He doesn't care whether Antichrist is called Christ or Satan—just that he is worshiped instead of God. He is content to be called Buddha, Confucius, Mohammad, or any name at all as long as you are not worshiping the true God.

Satan is orchestrating a worldwide political unity (the seven heads of Revelation 17 speak of totality of rule). It is not the world that thought up the concept of the United Nations; Satan is behind the scenes working in men's minds and hearts to establish a one-world political unity: *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of*

Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world [Satan is interested in a united earth]. ... 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 13:8, 16–17).

Satan desires worldwide financial and business unity. He is also looking for a worldwide financial organization (Revelation 13:17). Why is that so critical? Because the one who controls the purse strings is really in charge. This is very interesting: the more you study prophecy the more you realize that it won't be long before we will know who is really committed in the church. As soon as the government moves a little bit further, perhaps through an economic downturn or a non-linearity in the global economy, there are going to be some changes. When that happens, I am sure that church giving and similar kinds of donations will no longer be tax deductible. It will then be very unprofitable to be a Christian. Right now, it is very profitable for a lot of people; it will get you votes, and you are looked upon as good. But as soon as there is a financial, social, and political step back from Christianity, there will be fallout. Whenever it becomes politically incorrect to be a Christian, like it was for so many years in Eastern Europe, you will be denied privileges. Just as there have been racial barriers in this country, there will be religious barriers.

Satan desires worldwide spiritual and religious unity. This will be achieved as the beast is worshiped (Revelation 13:8, 11–12; 14:9; 16:2), the beast is beloved (Revelation 13:3), the beast is honored (Revelation 13:8), and the beast is confidently followed (Revelation 13:4).

Because Satan has to control the purse strings, there has to be a global financial system. When that happens, a political control will follow right behind, and then a worldwide religion to pull together this worship. That is what it says in Revelation 13:8a, 11–12: *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, ... Then I saw another beast ... And he exercises all the authority of the first beast ..., and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*

The same concept of global worship appears in Revelation 14:9–10a: ... *If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark ..., he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God* In Revelation 16:2 we see God's wrath being poured out on the First Church of Antichrist when ... *a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.*

This reminds me of a book by Peter Kreeft—*Ecumenical Jihad*, which I read in part. On the back cover, two well-known Christians recommend its reading. Do you know what the book is about? Briefly stated, the author, a Dutch theologian, was out surfing, got hit on the head, and had an out-of-body experience and stepped into heaven. The first to supposedly greet him and shake his hand in heaven was Confucius. The theologian asked him, "What are you doing here?" Confucius explained that he believed in one God, too, and assured him that it was the same god. Then he met Buddha and was really shocked. Buddha told him that the four laws of Buddhism are exactly what he, the theologian, believed. After thinking about it, he answered Buddha saying, "Yes, I guess I do." Next, he met Mohammed and asked, "Mohammed, you are

in heaven?" He said, "Yes, I believe in Mary, too." And I thought: *Okay, this must be a joke.* Then the theologian met Moses in this out-of-body experience in heaven. Moses reportedly informed him, "Yes, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, and a lot of other people are here because we all are seeking the same thing. We are seeking to worship Jesus and his mother."¹

I shut the book right then. But as I shut it, on the back cover I noticed this recommendation by J. I. Packer: "Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox alike need to ponder Peter Kreeft's vision of things—preferably in discussion. *What if he is right?*"² (emphasis added.)

To question whether something that God says is wrong—is *wrong*, and it is dangerous. For example, if parents tell their child no, that child shouldn't ask a question that directly contradicts what they said because that is a rebellious response. So then, as God's children, we shouldn't ask if what Kreeft says is true because we already know it is not.

What Jesus promised is that this coming global church is not going to be a church of snake handlers and demon worshipers. It is going to be a church of purported Christ worshipers. Satan will form his First Church of Antichrist *in place of Christ—not against Christ.* Members will worship a convenient Christ—a Christ that anyone can believe in because he doesn't offend them.

Jesus said, "*He who is not with Me is against Me...*" (Matthew 12:30a). There can be no neutrality in this conflict of the ages: you are either an earth dweller who will worship the Antichrist, or a pilgrim who will be raptured before the Tribulation to worship and enjoy the Lord God Almighty forever!

WEDNESDAY: Who Is the Woman on the Beast?

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters" (Revelation 17:1, emphasis added).

The woman of chapter 17 is in great contrast to the woman of chapter 12, who is of God. There are several clear identifying marks of the harlot bride of Satan in Revelation 17. If you think with me, you will understand what the apostle John is talking about. As we compare current events to the Scriptures, it gives us a good illustration of what may be the Revelation 17 scenario.³

The harlot is the apostate church. I personally believe that the apostate church will be the Roman Catholic Church merged with all the world religions. You may not believe that they would ever do that, but they already are. That is the horror of this. Most Americans don't pay any attention to this fact, but everyone else in the world knows.

The woman is a harlot: *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters..."* (Revelation 17:1). A harlot (prostitute) is a woman who has promised, but not kept her promise. It is a woman without faithfulness in spiritual worship. She is a spiritual fornicator—the great whore "... with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication ..." (17:2).

In verse 3 we see that the woman of chapter 17 is ungodly: ... *I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.* The only thing that conspicuously qualifies here is the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church. A newspaper article reported that in 1986 the leaders of the world's major religions gathered together with Pope John Paul II in Assisi, Italy.⁴ In addition to an immense group of protestant religious leaders, those present with all their objects of worship included snake worshipers, fire worshipers, spiritists, animists, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and North American Indian witch doctors. They all came to pray for peace. The Buddhists were allowed to place a drape over the altar of the Catholic church, add their little idols of Buddha, and worship. After the Buddhists took that down, the witch doctors were permitted to come in and dance around in their trance as they called out to their great spirit god. Next were the fire worshipers, the animists, and then all the pagan worshipers with the Dali Lama. The gathering allowed every religious group to come and worship as they saw fit because they said, "We are all seeking the same god."

This is the only thing that was true in the whole article: they are all seeking the same god—and that is the problem. The god of this world is not sought on an altar that is given over to snakes, fire, images, great spirit gods, and occult trances. There is only one entity that has continuously sought and conspicuously promoted spiritual fornication, and that is the ecumenical movement that shows up in many world religions, including the Roman Catholic Church. After 1986, Pope John Paul II sought to gather every religious leader of the world, and he found them all willing to make a pilgrimage to his doorstep.

The harlot wears purple and scarlet. This woman is not only a harlot and a woman, she *was arrayed in purple and scarlet* ... (17:4a). If you have ever watched any of these religious enclaves on the news, purple and scarlet is another identifier pointing to Rome whose external precious treasures of spiritual trappings are to make her beautiful. Purple and scarlet are the colors of the cardinals and the Roman religious system; they are also the two colors of the Roman Empire.

In the ancient world, purple was the most valuable and exquisite material for making clothing. Because it was so costly, only the Caesars and the very wealthy could afford it. That is why they threw a purple robe on Jesus—to make fun of Him; they hit Him with a stick because they knew He could never afford such a robe. It was all a big joke to them. The Roman Catholic Church is conspicuous in the external precious treasures—the spiritual trappings. The first floor's artwork in St. Peter's Cathedral is incalculable in its value. Some of those sculptures are forty feet high and twenty feet wide. They are worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and St. Peter's Cathedral is just one of thousands of buildings and businesses owned by the Roman Catholic Church around the world.

The harlot is wealthy beyond calculation. She is ... *adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls* ... (17:4b). No religious institution, past or present, even comes close to possessing the incalculable wealth of the Roman Catholic Church, which is estimated in the trillions of dollars by some Italian newspapers. Do you remember what Peter said? "*Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus [I come] ...*" (Acts 3:6). In contrast, the Roman Church says, "Silver and gold? I have lots of it! And you can't come in the name of Jesus

anymore!" See how things have changed? This woman, the harlot, is wearing purple and scarlet and has wealth beyond description.

The harlot is a city that sits on seven hills: "... *The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits*" (17:9). John was shocked at this. Perhaps it was because he saw it was a form of the church. (Or maybe that he also recognized Mary. It is interesting that Jesus commissioned John to take care of Mary until she died, which he did.) It really doesn't matter what shocked John, but rather that nothing else in Revelation had shocked him until now. Rome, often called the Eternal City, has always been known as "the city on Seven Hills" (the Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Quirinal, and Viminal Hills). This city is the home of a church that is intolerant of biblical truth, gives birth to much religious error, is the center of a mystery, is guilty of spiritual adultery, and has a golden cup. It is wealthy, clothed in purple and scarlet, and is a woman and a harlot.

The harlot rules over the kings of the earth: ... "*The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues*" (17:15). In verse 3 she is first seated on the beast, which means that for a time she directs the beast. This global political influence where she "sits on waters" stands for all peoples, which has often been wielded by the Roman Catholic Church in both European and present world history. There is only one religion that has ruled over the kings of the earth. Yes, the Muslim religion enslaved a lot of people. Yes, there are different religions that have political connotations, but there is only one church that has "sat" to raise up and put down kings. There is only one church that has determined the fate of the nations. If you read history, you will know that church—the Roman Catholic Church. She is sitting on the beast when we first meet her, and then the beast will consume her.

But what does that mean for our lives today? This truth prompts me to want to follow the disciplines that Paul charged Timothy to follow in 1 Timothy 4: nourish my soul in the Word of God daily (v. 4:6b), meditate on God's Word (v. 15), plus take heed to doctrine and hold on to it (v. 16). When we live in the end times, and the world is filled with deceiving spirits (v. 1), our only hope is in God, through His Word, and by His Spirit!

THURSDAY: What Is the Mass?

... not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:25–26, emphasis added).

The harlot is a woman wearing purple and scarlet with wealth beyond calculation, but the most graphic telltale mark is that this woman, this harlot, is wicked in spiritual adultery.

If we apply the first law of interpretation of the Bible, we will reason: What did the *apostle John* think about when he heard those words? (Not: What do those words mean to us today? And not: How can we somehow shoehorn somebody to fit into this standard?) All the way

through Revelation 17, you have to remember that this is the apostle John who is on a sun-baked island out in the middle of the Aegean Sea as a prisoner of Rome. When he saw purple and scarlet, he saw the Roman Caesars and Legionnaires. When he saw inestimable wealth, he saw the city of Rome. When he saw the city that ruled over the nations of the world, he was looking at the city of Rome.

I find it interesting that the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Egyptians, and the Greeks came and went. However, the Romans came and they have never gone. Did you know that the Roman Empire was never defeated or destroyed? It just broke up and dissipated. But there have been efforts to regather it: Napoleon, Bismarck, and Hitler all have tried. When John saw it, he saw a kingdom that had not been destroyed and is going to come back. But when he thought of this *golden cup* with the *abominations and the filthiness of her fornication*, he was not talking about peep shows and pornography shops. From God's perspective, he was speaking of spiritual abominations, spiritual adultery, and spiritual fornication.

The harlot is wicked (17:4): *The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.* This woman in purple and scarlet has a golden cup in her hand. This is the holiest instrument in Roman Catholicism: the golden chalice of the Eucharist. No doctrine in the world is more damnable than the Doctrine of Transubstantiation (re-crucifying Jesus at every Mass in every church around the world every day). This cup is a picture of a false and vile counterfeit of true communion with God. The golden chalice is filled with the filthiness of her abominations. Did you know that this is what they teach? They transform the "host" into the real body of Jesus; then they symbolically crucify it again. They pour out His blood again because they do not believe that His blood was sufficient when He shed it on behalf of the sins of the world—past, present, and future. Thus, they have to repeatedly re-offer Him.

The biblical view of the sacrifice of the Mass, the very heart of Roman Catholicism, is a denial of the completed work of the cross, which states that *Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many* (Hebrews 9:28a). Verse 28a does away with Romanism: not once an hour in the big cathedrals; not once a day at all the other ones; not all day long at those chapels surrounding St. Peter's Cathedral, the largest Roman Catholic Church in the world, but ONCE FOR ALL. This is the stake in the heart of Romanism. To those who trust in that once-for-all sacrifice, and eagerly wait for Him, He is going to appear—but not to those who are looking to be saved by crucifying Him over and over again. Do you see why this teaching is so important?

Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I am not against Catholicism: I am against Romanism—the Mass, purgatory, confessions, sacraments, Mary, penance, extreme unction, beads, robes, cathedrals, and Popes. True Catholicism is Peter, Paul, Jesus, John, and the New Testament. I love born-again Catholics, and all Catholics everywhere, but I hate any false teaching that denies salvation, as does Romanism.

Most people don't realize the dominant role the Roman Catholic Church has had. Did you know that the calendar of the world (except for the Muslims, Hindus, and Jews) was instituted by the Pope? The reason why there is a French Canada and a Catholic South America is a result

of Papal edicts. The reason we are here in protestant North America is due to a miscalculation of the Pope. So many things in the culture of the world have been decided by the Roman Catholic Church, which has exerted incredible control over civilization for 2,000 years. However, they are not the only culprit.

The harlot is a system (17:17): *"For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled."* This will occur when false world religions are united. As we saw in Revelation 13, the beast will change all religions into the worship of Antichrist. What is amazing is that the Roman Catholic Church is just a part of this whole system Satan has built. This is the system that substitutes God and His way for Satan's way, and God's truth for Satan's lies. The whole system evolved into a religion and, as we saw in Pergamos, when Rome conquered the world, they moved the center of the Babylonian's worship, including all the altars in Babylon, and brought them to Rome. Today, you can go through a building called the Pantheon ("all gods") that houses all the gods brought by people in the Roman Empire. That Pantheon is now a Roman Catholic Church.⁵

The problem is not just that they utilize those little temples, but that they worship the same way. Until the Roman Church began its domination under Constantine, there were no robes, no beads, no rosaries, no venerated images, no scapulas, no holy artifacts, no feast days, no confessions, no penances, no indulgences, no sacraments, no candles, no saints, and no Lent. Those things were assumed or developed after they took over the Babylonian traditions.

The harlot is a city (17:18): *"And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."* The "great city" is Rome. No other existing city in the world has a three-thousand-year history of continuous inhabitation, once ruled the world, and once headed a worldwide empire that has never been destroyed—only Rome. So John was shocked because he saw the church he loved, and had given his life spreading the gospel for, merge into one with the Roman Empire.

Should this city of rebellion that is to come discourage us? No, we must always remember what city we are to be looking for. We should not spend our lives looking for the city that will be destroyed, rather, as Hebrews 11 instructs us, we are to look for ... *the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God* ... (v. 10). We ought to live each day seeing it ... *afar off*... (v. 13), and be trusting our great and faithful God who has ... *prepared a city* ... (v. 16) for all who believe in Him and seek Him here on earth (v. 6).

FRIDAY: The Origin of Paganism in Romanism

"But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble" (Jeremiah 44:17, emphasis added).

How did Rome inherit such wickedness? Here is a brief overview of world history.

Pagan Origin: It is shocking for Roman Catholics to learn that the proposal of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice was first made in the ninth century by a Benedictine monk, Radbertus, who was the subject of many fierce verbal battles by the bishops until Pope Innocent III declared it an official Roman doctrine in A.D. 1215. The very principles found in the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass, as it is in the church of Rome today, can be traced back through the labyrinth of paganism to the fountain of idolatry—ancient Babylon. Rome's most blasphemous and massive religious fraud originated in Chaldean idol worship and will continue until the time of the end when, according to Revelation 17 and 18, amid the wonder and admiration of the world, Rome will be judged with violence and be thrown down and shall be found no more at all, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. This brutal, bloody, and blasphemous harlot is none other than the universal false church, the wicked wife of Satan!

"God had no sooner begun the blessed work in preparing for Himself a people than the devil did likewise. In fact, the first baby to be born on this Earth later became Satan's original convert!" See Genesis 4:8; this is where religion starts. As 1 John 3:12 explains, Cain was the tool of Satan. We shall now consider the historical, current, and future activities of this perverted prostitute.⁶

The Harlot Viewed Historically: Satan's church began officially at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9. This is the beginning of organized religion, nearly 24 centuries B.C. Here, in the fertile plain of Shinar, probably very close to the original Garden of Eden, the first spade of dirt was turned for the purpose of devil-worship.

The first full-time minister of Satan was Nimrod, Noah's wicked and apostate grandson (Genesis 10:8–10). Secular history and tradition tell us that Nimrod married a woman who was as evil and demonic as himself. Her name was Semiramis. Knowing God's promise of a future Savior (Genesis 3:15), Semiramis brazenly claimed that Tammuz, her first son, fulfilled this prophecy.

Semiramis thereupon instituted a religious system that made both her and her son the objects of divine worship. She became the first high priestess. Thus began the mother-child cult which later spread all over the world. From Babylon it spread to Phoenicia under the name of Ashteroth and Tammuz. From Phoenicia it traveled to Pergamos in Asia Minor. This is the reason for John's admonition to the church of Pergamos in the book of Revelation: "*I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is*" (Revelation 2:13).

In Egypt the mother-child cult was known as Isis and Horus. In Greece it became Aphrodite and Eros. In Rome this pair was worshiped as Venus and Cupid. Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost writes, "Several years ago I visited an archeological museum in Mexico City. A recent find had just been put on display, which Mexican archeologists had authenticated as belonging to the period about 200 years before Christ. The object was the center of religious worship among some of the early Indians in Mexico. To my amazement, it was an image of a mother with a child in her arms. This Babylonian religion spread abroad to become the religion of the World"⁷ What was the teaching of Semiramis' false church? That Semiramis herself was the way to God. She actually adopted the title "Queen of Heaven." She alone could administer salvation to the sinner through various sacraments, such as the sprinkling of holy water. Her son, Tammuz, was tragically slain

by a wild boar during a hunting trip. He was, however, supposedly resurrected from the dead forty days later. Thus, each year afterward, the temple virgins of this cult would enter a forty-day fast as a memorial to Tammuz' death and resurrection. After the forty-day fast, a joyful feast (Easter) called Ishtar took place. At this feast colored eggs were exchanged and eaten as a symbol of the resurrection. An evergreen tree was displayed and a Yule log was burned. Finally, hotcakes marked with the letter "T" (to remind everybody of Tammuz) were baked and eaten! This is similar to the practice of using wafers in the Mass today that are stamped with a symbol to make it a bloodless sacrifice of Christ's body.

In light of this history, it should be easy to understand the need to be discerning. Most of what is called "Christian" today is engineered by Satan, who masquerades as *an angel of light* (2 Corinthians 11:14). Ask the Lord daily to lead you in Truth so that you may be alert to *the wiles of the devil* (Ephesians 6:11).

SATURDAY: Satan's Plan Extinguished

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil ... (Hebrews 2:14, emphasis added).

How will Satan's masterful plan be extinguished? This is how. When the true church exits, the wheat and the chaff will be separated—the true bride of Jesus will be with Him in heaven while the false church remains on earth!

What is our hope as believers in Christ? We, like those converted during the Tribulation's horrors, are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Revelation 13:8 sums it up: *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

You see, those who are in the Lamb's Book of Life will never worship the beast. Instead, we will joyfully witness of our faith in Christ. Look at Revelation 17:8: *The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

There are six glorious elements describing those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life:

- 1. They are victorious ones because they are overcomers:** *"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).
- 2. They are joyful witnesses because they are secure:** *... Help these women who labored with me in the gospel ... and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life* (Philippians 4:3).

3. **They are newborn ones because it is the Book of Life:** *Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:15).
4. **They are blood-bought ones because it is the Book of the Lamb that was slain:**
... There shall by no means enter in anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27).
5. **They are glorified ones because they can enter the heavenly city:** *... those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life* (Revelation 21:27).
6. **They are the before-known ones because the Book of Life was written before the foundation of the world:** *... in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world* (Revelation 13:8).

That is so interesting! God has known what is going on all along, which fits with His sovereignty and omniscience. Those who are in Christ are known and called, chosen and faithful (Revelation 17:14b). There has been and always will be a tension in Christendom between those who are not comfortable with the idea of the sovereignty of God and those who are. But one place where we all meet is at the Scriptures—whether you are of the Wesleyan, Armenian, Charismatic background or of a Reformed Presbyterian Calvinistic persuasion. This we all know to be true: God calls and chooses, and we faithfully respond. That is the gospel. I like the way Warren Wiersbe puts it: “When you are headed toward heaven, you see a giant sign blinking that says, ‘Whosoever will may come.’ When you get there you are going to look back and it will say ‘chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.’”

Did you know that the sovereignty of God is something to be talked about in heaven rather than being a crippling debate fought over on earth? On earth we shouldn’t argue over the implications of “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.” What we are called to do is tell everyone: “Whosoever will may come and take the Water of Life freely.” There is not a group of people on this planet that I will not preach the gospel to and say, “You, too, can come to Christ today!” That is what Jesus did, and that is what we should do also. People just don’t walk around with a big “E” stamped on them to show that they are among the “elect.” But because God has said so, the elect will respond to the gospel. But that is only understood in heaven, and not on earth. It is a *mystery!*

Are you worshiping our Lord who has called you—and chosen you—the One to whom you should be faithful all your days?

Make a choice to live in hope. If you are a member of the true bride of Jesus, God has loved you with an everlasting love! With loving kindness He has drawn you to Himself. He chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world that you should be holy and blameless before Him. Because you have been called and chosen, be faithful to Him—as a pure bride for her husband. You can choose to live in hope in these end times by rejoicing that your name is written in the

Lamb's Book of Life. Rejoice that you will never be plucked out of your Father's hand! Rejoice that you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and will never be deceived from your faith and hope and joy in Christ! Rejoice that you are thus eternally secure!

I exhort you, with all my heart, to pass on that same faith and hope and joy to others. You are acquainted with many people who don't share that hope because they don't know your Savior. God has left you here on earth to take some of them with you to heaven. So I pray that you will streamline your schedule to make time to tell people about Jesus, to nurture them in the faith, and then have them as your hope and joy and crown of rejoicing when He comes or calls you to Himself.

In the apostle Paul's letter to his *beloved and longed-for brethren*, [his] *joy and crown* at Phillipi, he encouraged them to *stand fast in the Lord* (Philippians 4:1)! To those *whose names are in the Book of Life*, he urged: "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*" (Philippians 4:3c-4). His exhortation applies to us as well. And I dare say that if he were alive today, Paul would wholeheartedly sing "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart." May the Lord make the words of this beloved song a reality in your life as well.

Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart

*Rejoice, ye pure in heart,
Rejoice, give thanks and sing
Beneath the standard of your God,
The cross of Christ your King.*

*Bright youth and snow-crowned age,
Strong men and maidens fair;
Raise high your free, exulting song,
God's wondrous praise declare.*

*Yes, on thro life's long path,
Still singing as ye go;
From youth to age, by night and day,
In gladness and in woe.*

*Still lift your standard high,
Still march in firm array,
As warriors thro' the darkness toil
Till dawns the golden day.*

Refrain:
Rejoice, rejoice, Rejoice, give thanks and sing.

—*Edward H. Plumptre, 1821–1891*

Week 38—Live for What Is Eternal

(Revelation 18:1–19)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you live for what is eternal!



SUNDAY: The Coming Global Financial Collapse

“No man 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 [earthly treasures]” (Matthew 6:24, emphasis added).

A cataclysmic day is on the horizon of the future that will launch a series of events arresting everyday life on planet Earth! In a single moment—on a single day all over the world—the food supply will end; the transportation system will grind to a halt; the banking system will freeze and default; the luxuries, precious metals, gems, art, and all other hoarded wealth in every country will become worthless; the communications industry will be cut off, and there will be no radio, no TV, no telephone, no Internet; the supply of power will fade and blink off, and darkness will rule in the homes and businesses of the world. In short: there is a day when the lights are going off all over planet Earth—and they won’t be coming on any time soon!

The eighteenth chapter of Revelation gives us a road map for the coming economic collapse of the world. By learning the lessons God has laid down in His Word, we can see what response He desires from His servants—not only in the ultimate collapse but also in any other financial reversals or crises that may prompt widespread panic before the big and final crash.

Now let’s look at an overview of Revelation 18, which is a twin to Revelation 17. In Revelation 17 we find the collapse of the apostate world church—Satan’s harlot bride, the delusion of religion. Revelation 18 now reveals the other member of Satan’s family—materialism, worldliness, and covetousness. From the Garden of Eden onward, Satan has been offering the elusive “greener grass” to humans. According to each person’s own vulnerability, Satan thus whispers his lies: *If only you*

eat this “fruit,” you will have it all! If only you earn this income, you will be happy! If only you reach this level of popularity, power, or success, you will be fulfilled!

Hand in hand with Satan’s fall is the insatiable desire for more. Lucifer himself was discontented with the highest position in heaven—he wanted still more. Humans are born with a thirst for more of whatever they desire. This is the **idolatry of covetousness**.

The Bible clearly describes covetousness—this concept of the idolatrous worship of things: “to long for, be preoccupied with having what God has not given us.” Possessiveness [which is a cousin of covetousness] is “to be selfish and un-sharing with what God has given us.”¹ The book of Proverbs is full of illustrations of such idolatry. The Old Testament prophets have provided many examples of people who were preoccupied with and longed for what God had not given to them: they wanted something else—someone else’s wife or land. Worldliness either makes us covetous (we want what we do not have) or possessive (we want to hold on to what we have). Both are evil.

The most visible sign of covetousness is materialism. A sure sign of the covetous nature of materialism is its *insatiability*. Legitimate desires (such as food, drink, and companionship) can be satisfied. Illegitimate desires (such as pride, envy, greed, and lust), by their very nature, can’t be satisfied.

Materialism is the desire for “things” as opposed to spiritual worship, which is the desire for God. Materialism is seen in a passion for money, possessions, and endless pursuits of physical pleasures and recreations. But all that is going to end. In Revelation 18, the music stops, money fails, and possessions are worthless. In other words, the party is going to be over the moment the lights go out!

Revelation 18 describes the coming global financial collapse: Jesus condemns worldliness (vv. 1–3); Jesus calls saints to come out of worldliness (vv. 4–8); Jesus describes the worthlessness of worldliness (vv. 9–19); and Jesus celebrates the end of worldliness (vv. 20–24).

Why would John have such a vision on a prison island? When we come to Revelation 18 we are looking at the fully-grown evils of this world. As we saw in our study of Revelation 17, Babylon is at the same time an ancient city, a kingdom of the past, as well as a system of religion and a present way of life—worldliness, materialism, and covetousness. Babylonian materialism in Revelation 18 may be distilled down to one word in the Bible: covetousness, which is idolatry. It is the worship of “*mammon*” (money, possessions, and so on) instead of God.

In John’s day, Rome had gone to the limits in extravagance. The Caesars would spend fortunes on a single meal by demanding the most exotic and rarest dishes for their personal consumption. Nero decorated his banquets with roses from Egypt that cost \$70,000; he wore an outfit costing \$40,000—which he only wore once, as was his custom. Caligula demanded such meals as hummingbird and flamingo tongues, pearls costing \$200,000 dissolved in wine, the livers of pike fish, and the brains of peacocks. Because the commoners only earned a penny a day at this time, that gives you a better idea of the extreme lavishness of the Roman hierarchy.²

In the fifth century, St. Augustine noted the message of Revelation 18: the central problem of mankind is idolatry. Idolatry is when we use what we are supposed to worship—and worship what we are supposed to use.

If you put all the evils of our world into that grid, you will come up with this conclusion: Idolatry is using God for our own purposes, such as when we're in danger (in a foxhole, a hospital, a storm cellar, a plane shaking, and so forth) and worshiping anything else (by our devotion to money, sex, and pleasure). In other words, idolatry is using God, whom we are supposed to worship, and worshiping the things of earth that we are supposed to use.

So then, what does God want us to learn from Revelation 18? Many things, but primarily this: there is life beyond money. Life is more important than possessions; you can only take people with you to heaven.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, we think about how often our beloved Lord Jesus talked about money. He told us that money is the monitor of our heart—that our money and the pathway of our money show where our true treasures are invested. And by our use of money we prove to You where our allegiance and worship are directed. We pray that we will, in a very sobering and sincere way before You, ponder what it would be like in this world if we did not have money—if all our possessions and material things were stripped away from us either temporarily or permanently. What is left after we have no finances is really important for eternity. We pray that we would start rethinking life—about how to live in a way that counts, whether we have possessions or not. May we truly start thinking eternally, planning strategically, and talking prophetically so that our life's testimony points to the fact that this world is not our home—we are just parked here temporarily. We pray that You will open our hearts to these truths. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

MONDAY: Jesus Condemns Worldliness

... I saw another angel ... having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried ... with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen ... and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication ... and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury” (Revelation 18:1–3, emphasis added).

The first lesson of Revelation 18 is that worldly possessions can't buy spiritual life, but they can buy spiritual death. What we see in the first three verses is the drunkenness of the nations, their fornication, and their living for everything that God will not give them.

In these verses, I can see the rich and powerful families of the world—from Rockefeller to Rothschild, from Getty to Gates—who will stand and watch their billions go up in smoke from

the wrath of God. This scene graphically depicts what Jesus said in Matthew 16:26. And I believe it is what the *loud voice* of Revelation 18:2 will be booming throughout the earth at this global collapse: “*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*” (see Mark 8:36–37).

In the 1930s, William Randolph Hearst controlled many of the world’s newspapers. He was so wealthy that he did not even know what he owned. He bought castles in Europe, had pieces of them taken apart and shipped to California, and then reassembled on his estate. At one time his desire for art was so insatiable that he wanted to have every painting by a particular great master. He vowed to pay any price to get them all. In fact, he gave a blank check to a man he commissioned to travel throughout the world looking for the last painting. After two years, he finally found it. It was crated up in a storage facility in Long Beach, California, in a high security area. When he finally tracked down the owner—it was Hearst *himself!*

If you possessed all the paintings, money, stock, and comforts of life, but lost your own soul—what would you give back in exchange for your soul? That is what Revelation 18 is about. You can have it all on earth, but miss it all in heaven. What a sobering warning! God therefore says, ... *You rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you You have heaped up treasure in the last days. ... You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury ...* (James 5:1–3, 5).

From the Old Testament in the Garden of Eden through today, and to the end of time, God says to all peoples: “Get away from the worship of this world!” Don’t lay up treasures that rob you of peace about leaving home because you are afraid that something might happen to them. Don’t have so many possessions that you cannot sleep if you forget to turn on the burglar alarm. Don’t have so much stuff that you cut your vacation short because you have to get back to protect it. The care of riches is covetousness and idolatry. So the Lord says, “Give it to Me!”

The Bible has many grim markers that show where an illegitimate desire has given birth to immense disaster.

Achan’s lust for more led to his death by stoning, and a similar death for all his family. (See Joshua 7.)

Balaam’s greed made him fail to hear his own message. He wanted to die the death of the righteous, but he did not want to live the life of the righteous. (See Numbers 22:4–35.)

Delilah betrayed a man who trusted her, for a payoff. (See Judges 16.)

Solomon’s insatiable desire for more of everything led him away from God. He was warned not to multiply gold, women, and horses. However, he multiplied all three. (See Deuteronomy 17:16–17.)

Gehazi was not content with serving God; he lied to get more and paid dearly for it. (See 2 Kings 5:20–27.)

Judas measured the inestimable value of Jesus in pieces of silver. (See Matthew 26:15.)

Annanias and Sapphira could not let go of the money they possessed, nor the applause they coveted, so God killed them. (See Acts 5:1–11.)

Anything can be worshiped. Worship, simply stated, is “anything which captivates and draws us toward itself.” Here are the most common examples, as well as questions to help you evaluate whether or not you worship something other than God.

Work Worshipers: These are workaholics who are so captivated by work that they are irresistibly drawn to work all the time. *Can you give up your career and your goals in your field to the Lord if He calls you to change directions for Him?*

Escape Worshipers: These persons want to escape reality by worshiping the effects of alcohol or drugs, and thus they become alcoholics or drug addicts. *Can you completely stop taking whatever substances help you escape reality and give your life to the Lord?* If not, you worship the effects that substances give you. The Lord says, “You cannot worship both that and Me.”

Pleasure Worshipers: These may worship pleasure in the sensual realm, and thus become sex addicts, perverts, fornicators, or burn with adulterous lust. *Can you completely end all selfish sensual pleasure pursuits—pornography, fornication, sodomy, and adultery—and repentantly give those desires to the Lord to deal with in His perfect time and way?*

Wealth Worshipers: These persons are drawn by the allurements of wealth and possessions. They may become like the materialistic, greedy, and selfish rich fool Jesus spoke of—one who only planned for prosperity, eating, drinking, and enjoying life. *Can you completely give your money, security, and power into the Lord's control?* We cannot keep anything that we grasp onto—only what we give away will last forever.

Self Worshipers: These are drawn to the praise of man, and thus they are proud, inward-seeking, calloused, and unfeeling self-centered persons. *Can you give up your pride, self-seeking, self-absorption, and self-focus to humble yourself, deny yourself, and take up your cross to follow Jesus?*

The ultimate test of whether or not you worship something other than God is quite simple: *Can you give it up today?* When nothing satisfies you—you are on dangerous ground!

TUESDAY: Jesus Calls Saints to Come Out of Worldliness

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and ... receive of her plagues. For ... God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, ... give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’ Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her” (Revelation 18:4–8, emphasis added).

Revelation 18:4–8 is a repetition of the continually repeated warning. God wants us, His saints, to live out our high calling. We are called to be holy in all parts of our lives. To “separate from” and “get out of Babylon” is called for seven times in the Word of God. (See Isaiah 48:20; 52:11;

Jeremiah 50:8–9; 51:6, 8; Zechariah 2:6–7; Revelation 18:4.) Some of the key calls of God have been for men to get out of worldliness. You may be thinking: *Wait a minute, this is the Tribulation, the end of the world. So what is this?* There are still going to be Christians on the planet. There will always be Christians on this planet because we have the two witnesses (Revelation 11), the 144,000 (Revelation 7 and 14), and the angel preaching the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14). The gospel is continually going out, and people will be responding throughout the Tribulation.

From the Garden of Eden to the end of time, God has the same call to His saints: “Come out of worldliness! Get away from the worship of this world!” Look at what He has to say about this in the following verses.

God called Abraham out of his world to follow His way: “*Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you*” (Genesis 12:1).

God called Lot to totally abandon the sinfulness of Sodom: *Then the men said to Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take them out of this place!”* (Genesis 19:12).

God called Moses to stay out of the very presence of those rebelling against the Lord: ... “*Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram’*” (Numbers 16:23–24).

God promises great blessing for living a life that avoids the ungodliness around 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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night* (Psalm 1:1–3).

Jesus prayed for our realization that this world is not our home: *“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one”* (John 17:14–16).

God expects His children to come out—and stay out—of worldliness: *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? ... For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” 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 6:14–17).

God calls us to be careful to not associate with sin: *Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure* (1 Timothy 5:22).

Are you obeying God’s call to come out of worldliness? Are you worshiping God—and God alone? If you are struggling with worldliness, the key to victory and freedom is yielding to and obeying the Lord! For Jesus says, “.... *He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ... If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love ...*” (John 15:5, 7, 10a).

WEDNESDAY: The Worthlessness of Worldliness

“The kings of the earth who committed fornication [they knit their lives to the things of this world] and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning” (Revelation 18:9, emphasis added).

The possessions of this world are not worth coveting or worshiping. The words “weep and lament” speak of an uncontrollable sobbing and beating of the breast in anguish. Worldly possessions won’t last forever—they are insecure and will not endure in the end. Everything you see around you is going to be destroyed. *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness ...? (2 Peter 3:11).*

Worldly possessions can’t meet our deepest needs. Look at what happens in these verses: “*... Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come. And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all*” (Revelation 18:10-11, 14).

That passage lists eight categories of possessions that are going to be destroyed:

1. **Possessions of Security:** In the entire world’s history, the wealth of the rich has been protected against inflation, warfare, and decline because of their investments in gold, silver, and precious stones.
2. **Possessions of External Beauty:** These are the fine materials of clothing, decorating, and fashion.
3. **Possessions of Exquisite Furnishings:** This refers to rare woods such as thyanine (a single table top of this choice wood can cost \$10,000) and other expensive building materials like ivory and marble.
4. **Possessions of Personal Luxury:** These are the fragrances of perfumes and incenses, the oils of ointments and beautifiers, the spices of exotic cuisine.
5. **Possessions of Personal Indulgence:** The inclusion of wine would cover all the personal intoxicants, including distilled spirits (not known in the ancient world) and drugs (known and used back then). The oil named may be the olive oil of the ancient world or a prophetic look ahead to the vast petroleum industry.
6. **Possessions of Life:** The list also has foodstuffs for daily life; this would be all agricultural products plus the named fine meats.

7. **Possessions of Transportation:** The word for chariot is not the normal two-wheeler that we might picture from movies like *Ben Hur*; it is the four-wheeled wagon (Greek: *rheda*) of travel. This may be a prophetic look at the vast automotive industry.
8. **Possessions of Slavery:** The inclusion of slaves (“souls of men”) may indicate a resurgence of slavery which, though outlawed by Christian nations in the nineteenth century, continues in Asia and Africa. This could also be a spiritual reference to the sale of indulgences. All these things will be gone.

Worldly possessions can blind the soul to eternal concerns. Look at the depth of these verses in Revelation 18:15–19: “*The merchants ... will stand at a distance ..., weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, ... cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’ They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’*”

Remember what the prophet Zephaniah said: *Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land* (Zephaniah 1:18).

In four verses in Revelation 18, the earth dwellers lament their loss of luxuries, money, and things (vv. 9, 11, 15, 19) as well as the lightning-like speed of their loss (vv. 10, 17, 19). The “weeping and wailing” is the sound of the uncontrollable bawling of someone who has lost something irreplaceable. But in all the weeping and wailing, they fail to even notice that the greatest loss is their own souls! What a tragic scene!

THURSDAY: The End of Worldliness

“*Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!*” Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “*Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. ... For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth*” (Revelation 18:20–21, 23–24, emphasis added).

The people refused to listen to God’s servants—His holy apostles and prophets. Thus they lost their opportunity to live forever; instead, they will die forever.

Worldliness uses the deafening spell of entertainment. Gone will be the diversions. There will be no more music and tunes to drown out God and their problems. Music and entertainment will be shut down. The work that has captivated so many, keeping them from spiritual things, will cease. The regular grind (millstone) of life will stop. There will be nothing left to distract the earth dwellers from thoughts of God. This is just another of the endings of chapter 18: the profits of commerce end in verse 11; the enjoyment of exotic commodities end in verse 14; the whole system of materialism burns up in verse 21; and the very sounds of life—music, industry, and home—cease in verse 22. Finally, even light and social life stop in verse 23.

Why? Because of their sorceries “*all the nations were deceived*” (18:23). The Greek word for “sorcery” is *pharmakeia*, which refers to the drug-induced stupors of addiction, the demonic-induced bondage of the astrology industry, the godless and mindless following of evolution, and the dehumanization of mankind by philosophy and secular education.

Drugs and substances will be very prevalent during the end of days, and this trend is present even now. A friend of mine, who was recently in London, said that 200,000 marched there for the legalization of marijuana. People want their drugs and their escape. So God will say, “You were intoxicated, and did not hear My voice, so there is now no hope for you.” All these evils are facing judgment day.

Is there any diversion in your life that is distracting you from giving your all to God?

FRIDAY: Are You a Worldly Person?

... *Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* ... (James 4:4, emphasis added).

In Revelation 18 we also find that there are seven elements of the worldly system that Jesus will bring to an end. This is a cause for rejoicing, as they will no longer cause earth dwellers to ignore Him. The Lord will remove everything that has distracted people from looking at Him. To identify current dangers, traps, and snares, we will examine what the Lord will end. Here are the elements that worldliness is built upon—things that disrupt our fellowship with the Lord.

A worldly person’s identity is found in this world, and not in heaven: “*Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore*” (18:21b). Such a person’s identity is found in what they do, have, and hold onto here. They dress like the world, act like the world, and are drawn toward the world. But God will destroy any and all identities that are established apart from Him.

A worldly person finds escape through amusements, entertainments, and pleasure-seeking: “*The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore*” (18:22a). A worldly person has to be amused. Do you know what amusement means? “Muse” means to meditate, so “amuse” means “without meditation.” One of the fastest-growing sectors of our economy and our culture is amusement: parks, games, arcades, and movies.

People no longer want to think; they just want to be carried along by the action and excitement. Society has become so captivated by movies, music, and all else in the entertainment field that they never engage with the living and abiding Word of God. But God is going to turn it all off, and there will be no more distractions.

A worldly person uses work, career accomplishments, and even daily life as a way out of spiritual responsibilities: "*No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore ...*" (18:22b). Christians act the same worldly way when they say, "I don't have time for that because I have to work" or "I don't have time to lead my family or read the Bible." By the sweat of our brow, and diligent labor, we are supposed to earn money to support our family. If we don't, the Scriptures say that we are worse than an infidel—an unbeliever. Yet we must not be so wound up in our work that we are inconsistent in worship, and miss the joys of fellowship. It is a sign of worldliness when our careers, plans, finances, work schedules, recreation, and entertainment make us so busy that we infrequently engage with the people of God. Even the needs of daily life, such as food and housing, can keep some people away from heavenly living. But God will stop the cycle of life for all earth dwellers.

A worldly person is tied to technology, science, and knowledge of this world—and not the next: "*The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore*" (18:23a). Such a person constantly looks at the Bible through science rather than looking at science through the Bible. The Bible has always communicated the basic principles of hydrology, astrophysics, the rotation of the earth, and the geodesy-balancing of the continents, but the sciences are just now catching up with the Bible. In the industrialized world there has been a blind acceptance and intoxication of humanity by technological convenience. But God will soon cut short that technology.

A worldly person is tied to social life, party life, the calendar, and holidays: "... *The voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore*" (18:23b). This is the person who lives for the weekend. He or she goes from one social event to another because life represents an endless party. Life is more than identifying with this culture and its amusements and entertainment. There is so much more God wants us to know. That is why He lets us see that when He strips away these things, the socialites and partygoers will have nothing left. So they will weep and howl and cry out. But God will stop their partying, and that is all they had to live for.

A worldly person is tied to finances, wealth, and possessions: "... *Your merchants were the great men of the earth ...*" (18:23c). Our society makes gods of the millionaires and billionaires of this world. These earth dwellers find their greatness in money and belongings. They live to acquire and hold and enjoy things. But God is going to erase all the worldly person's assets.

If your assets were erased, what would you have left that really mattered? You would have the results of what you have invested in finances and time for Christ. You would have the opportunity, without the baggage of things, to go forward in His kingdom.

A worldly person is intoxicated by the world: "... *By your sorcery all the nations were deceived*" (18:23d). The end of this verse speaks of drugs and sorcery, which can include alcohol as well as drug-induced witchcraft. But there are also people who are intoxicated by the world

itself. They can't understand and don't care about the gospel. But God is going to bring an end to this familiar world.

What will the earth really be like when God pulls the plug? In Revelation 18:23a, we find some amazing words: "*The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore ...*" In twenty-first century terms, this verse says the power grid will be shut down. It says that no power, no electricity, and no technology that uses electricity will be running. Revelation 18 marks the end of the world as we know it. According to the Word of God, that will not happen for at least seven years from now. The world that ends in this chapter is a highly technological world that has some type of cashless society. This would require well-functioning computers, or something beyond computers that we don't even know about yet.

Although there is much more that I could say on this, I don't want you to miss the point of today's lesson. And that is to examine yourself in the light of Scripture to see whether any of these descriptions of a worldly person are common in your own life. If you feel convicted by the Holy Spirit, you need to know this truth: ... *You are slaves to the one whom you obey ...* (Romans 6:16 NIV). But you are not without hope.

Through Christ's empowerment, you can break any bondage that manifests itself in a love for the world and all that is in it! The cure begins with the antidote of *contentment*, which we'll administer in tomorrow's lesson. So take heart, for relief is on the way!

SATURDAY: Seven Keys to Contentment

... I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content (Philippians 4:11, emphasis added).

Contentment is a byproduct of following the Shepherd. It is experiencing the inner-peace that only He can provide. It is knowing that He will promote you at the right time. Contentment is the sense of satisfaction that comes to a husband and wife as they emulate the provision and care of the Shepherd to their own children. Contentment comes from serving Christ instead of money, and from providing not only financially for your family, but also emotionally, morally, and spiritually.³

How can such contentment be cultivated in our lives? First Timothy 6:6–17 describes seven principles that promote contentment.

Principle 1—Remember that things are only temporary: ... *Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and ... we can carry nothing out* (1 Timothy 6:6–7). You cannot take it with you. There are no U-Haul trailers behind hearses.

Principle 2—Only seek necessities, and wait for the rest: ... *Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content* (1 Timothy 6:8). We need shelter and the basic provisions of life, but everything beyond that is simply a great blessing. Whether it comes or goes is okay. God has said that all we are supposed to expect in life are food and clothing, so we should be happy with that.

Principle 3—Avoid a consuming desire for prosperity: ... *Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and ... many foolish and harmful lusts For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith ... and pierced themselves through with many sorrows* (1 Timothy 6:9–10).

America has been fed a prosperity diet. You might say, “That is not me—I am not rich.” If you own a car, you are rich. Ninety-five percent of the people in the world can’t afford a car. Your watch and the clothes you have on are worth more than what hundreds of millions of people on earth have. Tens of thousands even starve to death around the world each year, but Americans regularly throw away super-sized leftovers.

Principle 4—Flee materialism: ... *Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness* (1 Timothy 6:11). Do you seek to accumulate possessions—or to grow in Christlikeness? Value what will count for eternity!

Principle 5—Cling to eternal life: *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called Keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing* (1 Timothy 6:12, 14). We need a whole generation of people who are holding tighter to eternal life than they are to this world.

The writer of Hebrews says, ... *You had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven* (Hebrews 10:34). When those Christians were persecuted and their jobs and possessions taken away, they still rejoiced because their focus was on Christ.

If we’re not careful, before long our possessions can possess us. They then become an anchor that holds us back. The care of riches clouds our minds from seeking the purity of Christ.

Principle 6—Fix your hope on God: *Command those who are rich ... not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God ...* (1 Timothy 6:17). There is nothing wrong with wealth, but we are to recognize the danger of relying upon it. All that we own can evaporate as quickly as a blip on a computer screen. There are few things that are real possessions in this world. Through money, stocks, and bonds you are trusting that a company, a bank, or a government won’t fail. But the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy, can never fail us—and our trust in Him is certain!

Principle 7—Give until it hurts: *Let them do good, ... ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life* (1 Timothy 6:18–19). The real cure for materialism is to give until it hurts! Giving “until it hurts” means giving at the cost of personal sacrifice. For example, the widow gave both of her mites, or all that she had (Mark 12:42–44). The woman who anointed Jesus broke the flask of fragrant oil and irrecoverably gave all she had to Him (Luke 7:37–47). Sacrificial gifts are especially important to Jesus.

Make a choice to live in hope. The advantages of contentment are many: freedom, gratitude, rest, peace—all of which are also components of good health. Those who are content do not have to worry about the latest styles or what to wear tomorrow. Those who are content can

rejoice in their neighbor's good fortune without having to feel inferior. Those who are content do not fret about wrinkles or graying because they accept what comes. Those who are content do not have to worry how they might buy this or that because they have no desire for this or that. Those who are content are not consumed with how to get out of debt because they have no debt. They thus have time for gratitude even in small things, and they have time for relationships because their possessions and the bank do not own them.

If what was just described seems beyond you right now, I encourage you to ask the Lord to help you move in that direction. In doing so, you will be choosing to live for what is eternal. Be content—willingly surrender all that you are and have to the Lord. Then faithfully fight the good fight of faith by laying hold on the eternal life to which you were also called.

As this week's devotional closes, I encourage you to softly and worshipfully sing the words of this beautiful old song as a prayer of commitment to the Lord.

Have Thine Own Way, Lord

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the potter, I am the clay!
Mold me and make me After Thy will,
While I am waiting, Yielded and still.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Search me and try me, Master, today!
Whiter than snow, Lord, Wash me just now,
As in Thy presence, Humbly I bow.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Wounded and weary, Help me I pray!
Power, all power Surely is Thine!
Touch me and heal me, Savior divine.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being Absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit Till all shall see
Christ only, always, Living in me.*

—Adelaide A. Pollard, 1862–1934

Week 39—Give All to God

(Revelation 18—Stewardship)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you give your all to God!



SUNDAY: Giving God Your All

... What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Corinthians 4:7, emphasis added)

Last week we learned that Revelation 18 spells out the end of the political and economic system of our world. In one brief chapter, all the ages of man's greed come to a halt. That chapter is about God disrupting everyday life. It defines the judgment of God upon a society that worships the Creation—technology, pleasures, comforts, and all other allurements of this world—instead of the Creator.

God wants us to give Him everything, which starts by first giving ourselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5). If Christians aren't careful to remain alert to the deceptions of the devil, they, too, can become ensnared with a love for this world and all that is in it—often without realizing that they have been taken captive.

Becoming gradually attached to the world can happen to anyone (1 Corinthians 10:12). Have you ever heard the frog story? It is simply this: If you place a frog into boiling water, it immediately senses the danger and will hop back out. However, if you place that same frog into tepid water, and then slowly turn up the heat, the frog is deceived into thinking everything is fine—until it is too late! Satan works his wiles in the same manner, so we must remain alert in order to escape being ensnared in his "worldliness trap."

So before moving on to Revelation 19, we will do a three-week "Life Stewardship Series" on how to conquer worldliness. We will learn how to give our all to God; how to give to God what is His in this life; and how to live contentedly and victoriously for Christ, which is our Great Physician's

antidote for worldliness. It all starts with discerning whether you are a pilgrim sojourning here for a short time—or an earth dweller with roots.

Have you read John Bunyan's (1628–1688) classic book entitled *Pilgrim's Progress*? (If you haven't, I hope you will.) He wrote from an English prison cell to which he was condemned for unlicensed preaching of the gospel. This is how he interpreted the words of Christ and Paul: "Whatever good thing you do for Him, if done according to the Word, is laid up for you as treasure in chests and coffers, to be brought out to be rewarded before both men and angels, to your eternal comfort."¹

If you are a pilgrim in the biblical sense, you have the opportunity to send ahead building materials for the home you are going to live in. God's children are not going to be walking in the clouds wearing halos and strumming harps all the time. We are actually going to have a place where we eat, and most likely to which we can invite people. Jesus said, "*In my Father's house are many mansions ...*" (John 14:2a). That means rooms in a great house. We will have an address some day, and we are going to go live there eternally. Isn't that fantastic?

But there is one catch. God says that there are only two types of building materials: wood, hay, and stubble—or gold, silver, and precious stones. I believe that for all eternity the evidence of our stewardship on this planet will be displayed by the place in which we dwell in our Father's house. That is why God is going to have to wipe away all the tears when we get there, for some of us have been sending wood, hay, and stubble that will turn to soot and ashes! But that need not be your case; learn from what these godly saints sent ahead.

- **John Wesley:** "I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity."
- **David Livingstone:** "I place no value on anything I possess except in relation to the Kingdom of God." (That is why he lived out his last days in Africa.)
- **Martin Luther:** "I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

God's kingdom was the reference point for these men. They viewed everything in light of the kingdom. They were compelled to live as they did because they treasured the right things.

To which world are you attached? Do you have the pilgrim mentality that recognizes that this world is not your real home—or are you clinging to this old world for the duration of your life? I believe that God will show you the truth as you move through the next few weeks of lessons. And you will be blessed because of it!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, I pray that Your Spirit will touch our hearts with the reality that You own the universe and are sitting at the finish line. May we live this life acknowledging that You own "me and mine." I pray that we would hold our unclenched hands toward You and say, "All I am, and all I have, I give to You." Father, I pray that You, who inhabit our thoughts and hear our words before they are on our tongues, would have heard from Your people the most transforming word we could*

give You from our salvation onward—“We relinquish the care of all that we are and have so that we can be free to live and walk by faith as Your servants.” Lord, we want to be good stewards; help us to invest time in Your Word getting our marching orders. Help us to spend time talking to You to find out how You want us to manage our time, treasures, and talents. Help us to desire to do things that draw us to You, oh Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

MONDAY: Are You a Pilgrim or an Earth Dweller?

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but ... were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Hebrews 11:13, emphasis added).

When it comes to money, possessions, and eternity, if someone were to assess your life, would they say that more of you is here on earth—or more of you is in heaven? Tertullian (ca.155–230), a lawyer who became a Christian in the early years of the church, once said: “And so it is that when a man walks along a road, the lighter he travels, the happier he is; equally, on this journey of life, a man is more blessed if he does not pant beneath a burden of riches.”

As we look through the Scriptures at what the Spirit of God inspired the Old Testament writers to say, what Jesus said, and what the apostles said, realize that I will never give any disclaimers. In other words, I will never tell you: “That is what the Bible says, but it doesn’t mean that.” If you really look at what the Bible says to Christians about money, it is very uncomfortable. And I hope that you start feeling as uncomfortable as I do, because I have studied these words a long time. It is not my place to make you feel comfortable—it is to share what the Bible says.

Thomas a Kempis (c. 1380–1471), who authored the classic book entitled *Imitation of Christ*, had this advice: “Let temporal things serve your use, but the eternal be the object of your desire.”

J. H. Jowett once said, “The true measure of our wealth is how much we would be worth if we lost all our money.”

The great prophet Hosea, who wrote several hundred years before Christ, tells us: “*When they had pasture, they were filled ... and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me*” (Hosea 13:6). Every time our pastures get green and our fields get full, we run the risk of forgetting who made them green, and who filled them. God owns it all! Have you ever given back the title deed of whatever He has entrusted to you?

When I bought my first car as a young man, I purchased it from a white-haired lady about eighty years old. She had this “boat”—an old Caprice that was so big you could put a couch in the back seat. This lady told me that she wanted to sell her car to me for a good price. I knew she was serious when she pulled out the title and signed it over to me. Many of us have told God that we would like to give Him our lives and everything we have, but He knows we are actually serious about such a commitment when we pull out the title deed to our lives and say: “All I am, all I have, and all I will ever be—I now sign over to You!”

Have you signed over the title deed of your life to Christ? Prayerfully consider 2 Corinthians 8:5: ... *They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.*

Are you rich toward God, or just yourself? The parable in Luke 12:13–21 portrays the futility of wanting more and more possessions. Jesus called the rich man, “Fool!” (v. 20). Prayerfully consider what Jesus said next, “*So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (v. 21).

Do you live for yourself each day, or for Him? Prayerfully consider 2 Corinthians 5:15: ... *He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*

Does God have the proper place in your life? Prayerfully consider Romans 14:12: ... *Each of us shall give account of himself to God.*

If you have signed over the title deed of your life to God, and are rich toward Him (as Jesus explained in Luke 12:21) by living for Christ every day, and are giving the Lord His proper place in your life, then you are a pilgrim. If you were not able to honestly affirm that you’ve given your all to Him, then you are most likely living with the attitude of an earth dweller.

TUESDAY: Jesus, Money, and the Believer

“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21, emphasis added).

While I was pastoring in the South, I heard this story about a new pastor. His first sermon had three points. The first was: “Make all the money you can make.” The people said, “Amen.” The second was: “Save all the money you can save.” And the people then said, “Amen!” The last point was: “Give all you can to God.” It suddenly got very quiet in the church. After the sermon, the elderly head of the *deacons* commented: “That was a great sermon till you ruined it on the last point.” In other words, we like to make all we can make, and save all we can save, but as soon as people start talking about our money and giving, we get offended—and call that “meddling.”

Why talk about money at all? One out of every seven words Christ spoke was about money and possessions. If you do the math, the emphasis is there, no matter how you analyze Christ’s words. Sixteen of His thirty-eight parables focus upon the handling of money. Of the nearly 2,800 verses in the four Gospels, 288 direct our use and possession of money. Fifteen percent of the teachings of Christ are about proper and improper handling of our stewardship: *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21).

There are over 500 references to prayer in the New Testament, just under 500 references to faith, but over 1,000 references to money and possessions, and where God fits in all that. That amounts to twice as many references to money as there are to prayer. Isn’t that interesting? The conclusion: Christ accorded to money an astounding prominence in His teaching.

Why did He give it such prominence? Money is one of the central realities of life, and it affects us all from the cradle to the grave. Jesus would have been unrealistic had He not given it due prominence. So what place does money have in your daily plans for your life?

Money is an acid test of character. Whether a person is rich or poor, if you discover his attitude about money, you will gain a deep insight into his character. One cannot be neutral where money is concerned. Do you love money or God most?

Money has potential for good or evil. This fact is obvious, and thus needs no elaboration. Are your moneymaking and spending choices causing you to be more godly—or less?

Jesus teaches that some people hold on to things with grasping, clenched fists, and end up losing them. He advises that the way to keep things longer is to open our hands, hold those treasures in upturned palms, and say: “You are the Giver of all that I have. You alone are the owner of all things. I am Your servant forever. I will be a steward for You of all these possessions. When You want anything back, just tell me, and it is Yours!”

The Jews used to do this. If you could be transported back in time to the tabernacle or the temple, you would see Jewish people walking in. The father would be at the head of the family procession, and he would hand their wave offering to the priest. They were saying to Him: “It is in my hands and it belongs to You. Everything I have comes from You. Everything I have belongs to You.” It was a visible representation of God’s ownership.

Such an attitude changes us from thinking, *How much of my money should I give?* to *How much of God’s money should I keep?* So then, stewardship is giving of ourselves, without reservation, to the Lord.

WEDNESDAY: God Owns You and Me

... Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit ... and you are not your own ... For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, emphasis added).

God owns you and He owns me. God owns the universe and the finish line that we are all going to cross, whether we die or He comes for us. In the verses above, Paul is saying, “No, it’s not your life. You own nothing, not even yourself. When you came to Christ you surrendered the title to your life. So you belong to God, and not yourself. He is the only One who has the right to do what He wants with your life—your body, sexual behavior, money, possessions, everything. If you belong to Him, you owe God your full obedience.”

Look at the problems the Corinthian believers suffered because they did not grasp Paul’s point:

- Chapter 1: They were puffed up with their wisdom.
- Chapter 2: They discussed who was enlightened and who was not.
- Chapter 3: They built on the wrong foundation.
- Chapter 4: They argued over the stewardship of things.

- Chapter 5: They had problems morally.
- Chapter 6: They took each other to court.
- Chapter 7: They had problems with their marriages.
- Chapter 8: They did things with demons.

They had one problem after another. Do you know what these people were doing wrong? By their lifestyle, they were saying what we often say about our own lives: "I can do what I want with it."

The point is this: God is not just the owner of the universe in general, but the owner of each of His saints in particular. In fact, we are twice God's—first by creation, and second by redemption. Recognizing His ownership means living in the light of this overriding truth. It is living life with the acute awareness that we are managers, not owners. We are caretakers of God's assets, which He has entrusted to us while we are on earth. I have many friends who manage companies. They do not own them; they manage them, and are answerable to the owners or stockholders. Owners are answerable to the marketplace and the government, and they have more power.

How we handle our money and possessions will be determined by whom we *really* believe to be their true owner—and ours: ... *He died for all, that they which live should not ... live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again* (2 Corinthians 5:15 KJV, emphasis added).

When I first memorized 2 Corinthians 5:15, it was a class assignment at college. Those three words "but unto Him" really gripped me. I remember taking a marker and writing on the face of my watch "but unto Him." Because we look at our watches frequently, I would see those words and think: *Is the way I am living right now acknowledging the fact that He died for me that I should no longer live for myself but unto Him?* When will we be measured for how we did at living for Jesus? Second Corinthians 5:10a gives the answer: *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*

We are all going to stand individually before Him ... *that each one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad* (2 Corinthians 5:10b). The conclusive proof of spiritual change will be seen in an altered perspective on handling money and possessions.

Note the words of John the Baptist's message of a changed heart's response: *Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "... Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance ... [for] every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He ... said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said ..., "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said ..., "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages"* (Luke 3:7–14, emphasis added).

Our lives will be judged according to whether or not they were lived “unto Him” or “unto self.” The first step to grasping Christian stewardship is acknowledging that God is the owner of all—you included. Do you have this mindset: “I don’t own *anything*. My life is to be lived ‘unto Him’!”?

THURSDAY: God Owns It All!

Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it (Deuteronomy 10:14, emphasis added).

We need to let God’s truth impact us today. As you read through the verses below you will see that God really does own everything! (Emphasis added to the verses below.)

- “... *All that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; ... And You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, ... In Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all*” (1 Chronicles 29:11–12).
- “... *Everything under heaven is Mine*” (Job 41:11).
- *The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein* (Psalm 24:1–2).
- “... *The world is Mine, and all its fullness*” (Psalm 50:12).
- “*The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine*, says the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:8).
- “*If I ... said to fine gold, ‘You are my confidence; if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great ...; if I have observed the sun when it shines, or the moon moving in brightness, so that my heart has been secretly enticed, ... this also would be an iniquity deserving of judgment, for I would have denied God who is above*” (Job 31:24–28).

Job was saying, “If I am counting on anything or anyone but God to help me to the end of my life, then I have offended God.” That does not mean that you should get rid of all your money, because God’s Word clearly says that you are supposed to prepare for the future by wise financial stewardship. In fact, Proverbs says a lot about saving money. The problem is that in our humanness we have trouble knowing when to save, and when to make a new investment in God’s work.

Since money is one of the essentials of the work of the kingdom, it is not surprising that God’s great adversary, Satan, does all in his power to prevent money from finding its way into the Lord’s treasury—and for that Satan has many tricks in his bag to deceive His saints.

Spending: Satan encourages us to overcommit by purchasing more than we can afford on time payments so there is little left over to give to God. Is your spending under control?

Upgrading: Satan plays on our competitive instincts and incites us to constantly upgrade our standard of living so that any increases in income are already committed. When John Wesley was earning thirty dollars a year, he lived on twenty-six dollars and gave the rest to God. When

his salary was raised to sixty dollars, he lived on twenty-six and gave the rest to God (the dollar amounts equal British pounds). That would be viewed as ridiculous in our society.

Waiting: Satan dries up the fountains of generosity in the heart by suggesting postponement of giving to some future time. The stifling of a generous impulse today makes it easier for us to do the same tomorrow. You hear an appeal, and are touched to help with a mission project or other investment in the kingdom of God, but you wait. Delay dries up the grace of giving.

Leveraging: Satan so arranges things that the assets of the generous man become frozen or overcommitted so that he cannot give what he genuinely wishes to give. Expanding business too rapidly often demands reinvestment on a scale that leaves little for giving. (Luke 12 and the parable of the rich fool come to mind here.)

Keeping It to the End: Satan takes advantage of our uncertain times by promoting fear in many elderly that their savings will be exhausted before they expire. Others, he motivates to hoard in order to pass the wealth on to their children.

Satan thus encourages people to short-circuit current giving to God's work through what Dr. A. J. Gordon called "extra corpus benevolence"—that is the postponement of generosity until after death. This is an interesting concept. We should be sure to invest in God's work before we die.

Why is it that so many Christians make "death" their executor, leaving thousands and millions to be dispensed by his bony fingers? There is no doubt that it is wise to make modest provision for our dependents, as we are able, but surely it cannot be termed Christian generosity when a man waits until death to shake his wealth out of his pockets.

Let us give all we can in our lifetime, and have the joy of seeing our money work for God. He promises a reward for "deeds done in the body," not out of it. To be generous with God from right motives brings its reward here as well as hereafter.

FRIDAY: Seeing the Finish Line

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:7, emphasis added).

God is the One waiting at the end of life to assess our lives. He is the One who is going to determine our eternal habitation: eternal bliss or doom. He inhabits all of time—the past, present, and future. In fact, He Himself is beyond time. How can that be?

If you were on the star Alpha Centauri, 4.2 light years away, the light reaching you would be from four years ago. We don't have any trouble thinking about that. If you were on some distant galaxy that is hundreds of light years away, looking back at planet Earth through a telescope, you would be looking at events that happened hundreds of years ago.

In a real sense, everything that has happened here is still traveling out into the cosmos. I don't know how that can be, I just know that God said all the events (past, present, and future) are in front of Him at all times. Did you know that every word we have said, everything we have done, is radiating up in front of God right now? He sees it all equally, and He is standing at the finish

line of our lives. The only thing that gets rid of the bad we have done is the blood of Jesus Christ. That is why it is so wonderful being a Christian. Although unbelievers have to face all their sins at judgment day, we get to “delete files” that we know are bad.

Jesus is standing at the finish line—and He controls all things: “... *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). And Psalm 103:12 tells us that *as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us* (emphasis added).

Remember: *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 5:10). When I talk to people about Christ, I like to show them these verses. We need to know that all of us are going to stand alone before God.

We are going to individually answer His questions to account for our lives, for God owns both the universe and the finish line: *For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ... We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "... Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God* (Romans 14:7–12).

Stop for a moment and think about what you expect to have in heaven. Remember: all that you can take with you are those you've influenced with the Word of God. And the only thing that you can send ahead is money and time invested in the Lord. In the space provided below, you may wish to list some of your accountings as of today.

1. Here is a list of those I have seen come to Christ through my witnessing and prayers:

2. I have invested time for the Lord in the following ways:

3. I have invested money sacrificially by giving to these areas Jesus approves of:

How are you doing in getting ready to stand before Jesus to give an account of how you invested your life?

SATURDAY: Transferring the Title Deed to God

... Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1–2, emphasis added).

God owns all things, *whether* we recognize it or not. But life becomes much clearer, and in some respects much easier, when we consciously and continuously choose to acknowledge that truth. The question is not whether we theoretically affirm God's ownership. The question is whether we have deliberately transferred the ownership of our assets and ourselves to Him—like that sweet little white-haired lady who wanted to sell me her car when I was a teenager. It was hers, and no matter how much she told me she wanted me to have it, it was not mine until she relinquished the title deed to it; then it became mine. We can talk about God, and sing numerous songs of commitment, but until we actually give our all to Him, it is not real.

Have you invited Him to be what Scripture says He is—the Creator, owner, and controller of your family, your possessions, your money, and yourself? And have you extended the invitation again after you have taken things back into your own hands? Such self-surrender to God is the beginning of true stewardship.

When we come to grasp that we are stewards, not owners of our money, it totally changes our perspective. Suddenly we are no longer asking, “How much of *my* money shall I—out of the goodness of *my* heart—give to God?” Rather, we are asking, “Since all of my money is really *Yours*, Lord, how would *You* like me to invest it today?”

Commonly, most Christians reverse this. Instead, they think that it is really magnanimous of them to give God something. But in reality, it is all His anyway, so how much are you keeping of His money? His time? His talents?

It was revolutionary when I truly realized that God has a claim on *100 percent* of “*my* money”—not just a few dollars to throw in an offering plate, or whatever percentage I was willing to give Him. Suddenly I was God’s steward, God’s money manager. I am not God. Money is not God. God is God. He is in His place, and I am in mine.

Not only does God own everything, but He also controls everything. Again, the implications of this are enormous. I don’t have to own everything. I don’t have to control everything. It is better in His hands than mine. And when catastrophe strikes, I can honestly adopt the posture of John Wesley when someone told him that his house had just burned down while he was away from home preaching. He said, “No, the Lord’s house burned down. That means one less responsibility for me.”

As Wesley did, we must remind ourselves of both God’s role and ours to gain perspective in the face of loss or turmoil. What a life-changing and freeing perspective is God’s ownership and sovereignty when the house is robbed, the car is totaled, the bike is stolen, and even when the diagnosis is cancer. We thus can think: *It is not my life; it is not my body; my possessions are not mine. They belong to God.* Accordingly, we have two choices:

1. **We can give ourselves to God:** ... *They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will* (2 Corinthians 8:5 NIV). It is easier to staff the material needs and ministry positions of a church if this is obeyed absolutely and positively.
2. **We can neglect to give ourselves to God and live for our own pleasure:** "*This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God*" (Luke 12:21 NIV).

Do you believe that God owns you? Have you acknowledged that to Him? Will you relinquish the anxious care of stuff and the continuous calculating of whether you will have enough? Will you trust God to tell you when He wants some of it, and how to be a steward of it?

If you send your treasures ahead to be with Christ, you will never have to worry about which way the markets go. And you won't have to fret about lightning strikes, tornadoes, or floods—because He is the Master of the winds and the waves. You can safely entrust all that you have to the care and control of your almighty God.

Make a choice to live in hope. When we come to Christ, God puts all His resources at our disposal. He also expects us to put all our resources at *His* disposal. This is what stewardship and life in Christ is all about.

If God has deeply touched your heart through this week's devotionals, to reinforce this vital concept of stewardship in your mind, I suggest that you sit down and actually draw up a title deed to your life. (You may wish to use the one below from Randy Alcorn's incredible book: *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*.²)

Date:

I hereby grant to the Lord my God myself, all of my money, possessions and all else I've ever thought of as mine, even my family.

From this point forward I will think of them as His to do with as He wishes. I will do my utmost to prayerfully consider how He wishes me to invest His assets to further His Kingdom.

In doing so I realize I will surrender certain temporary earthly treasures and gain in exchange eternal treasures, as well as increased perspective and decreased anxiety.

Signed:

In light of all He's done for you, what are you willing to do for Jesus? I exhort you to make a choice to live in hope! Take a moment, please, and meditate upon the challenging words of this old song:

I Gave My Life for Thee

*I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be, And quickened from the dead;
I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou giv'n for Me?
I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou giv'n for Me?*

*My Father's house of light, My glory circled throne,
I left, for earthly night, For wand'rings sad and lone;
I left, I left it all for thee, Hast thou left aught for Me?
I left, I left it all for thee, Hast thou left aught for Me?*

*I suffered much for thee, More than thy tongue can tell,
Of bitt'rest agony, to rescue thee from hell;
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee, what hast thou borne for Me?
I've borne, I've borne it all for thee, What hast thou borne for Me?*

*And I have brought to thee, Down from My home above,
Salvation full and free, My pardon and My love;
I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee, What hast thou brought to Me?
I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee, What hast thou brought to Me?*

—Frances R. Havergal, 1836–1879

Week 40—Giving God What Is His

(Revelation 18—Stewardship)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you learn to avoid materialism and give God what is His in this life!



SUNDAY: First I Give Myself

... They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God (2 Corinthians 8:5, emphasis added).

Last week we learned how to give our all to God. This week, we will focus on how to give God what is already His in this life. Some of this material may overlap a bit concerning principles discussed previously, but please bear with me. A subject this critical to building a fireproof life often needs to be said in different ways so that every reader can more fully grasp the importance of the message.

What I am about to share contains some principles that my Christian parents began to instill in me when I was yet a young boy. The earliest memory I have of growing up in a Christian home is that of separating out the Lord's part from whatever I earned each week. Until I was older, my parents said that I could give the Lord's portion to our church or send it to missionaries. Thus, I started supporting missionaries when I was eight years old—at an age when I could write just legibly enough to be read.

When I was twelve years old, a missionary visited our church in search of Mr. Barnett, thinking that my dad was the one who had been supporting him. Dad corrected that missionary's misconception and referred him to the chubby kid in tennis shoes. The missionary then asked me, "You are Mr. Barnett?" I said, "That's me, and I have been supporting you for four years." I had sent my ten dollars every month to that missionary in Thailand. Why? Because my parents taught me that God would always bless and honor sacrificial giving. My parents said that I should start by giving at least 10 percent to the Lord, and be open to increasing the percentage. So I used to experiment with 10, 20, and 30 percent to see if I had anything left at the end of the month.

When Bonnie and I were preparing to be married, we decided that starting with our first paycheck we were going to give not 10 percent, but 11 percent (not wanting to be legalistic about our giving). The next month we gave 12 percent; then 13, 14, and so on. We kept increasing the percentage until it was in the 20s, and then our first child was born. Expenses were much higher, so we dropped percentage points until we could balance our budget. As we were able, we started giving even more, until our second child was born, and then we had to go back down again.

In this process, we learned that if we were going to give to God, we could not live at the same level as the people around us who were earning the same amount of money. Although you may not have the same conveniences, comforts, and freedoms that those people do, when you choose to honor God with what is rightfully His, you have chosen the better way—the fireproof way!

What you are going to see in the Scriptures in this week's devotionals is very true—God cannot be outdone when it comes to His blessings. This does not mean that if you give everything to the Lord you are going to be rich. But among His people there is to be a sacrificial, systematic, proportionate giving out of the blessings He has given. In eternity, such giving will be of inestimable value; on earth, it is an act of obedience.

If you can maintain the same standard of living as the person living next door, who earns the same amount of money, then I would suggest that you have not learned to honor God with your possessions. It costs something to honor the Lord.

It is critical for your spiritual life that you learn, as Martin Luther said, "The last part of a human being to get saved is their money." God wants to *own you—not just touch your life!*

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, we know that Christ died for all, that we should henceforth no longer live unto ourselves, but unto You. Therefore, we freely give to You that which is already Yours. May we dispense it for Your glory, and in Your name, that we might have eternal treasures. We pray that You will make us Your good and faithful stewards. We pray that we will give as Your Word instructs, and that we will limit our lifestyles so that we are able to give systematically. We do not want to go one step ahead or behind Your plan. We bow to You now, for Christ's sake. Amen.*

MONDAY: What Is Materialism?

Put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, **which is idolatry** (Colossians 3:5, emphasis added).

God has given us stern warnings about materialism. Materialism is when we make our sources of security, hope, trust, and pleasure in some material thing instead of the Lord. It grows into an insatiable desire to have things as our security, pleasure, and for the building up of our lives.

Greed is demonstrated in possessiveness (selfishness with *what we have*) and covetousness (longing for *what we don't have*). Just as hate amounts to murder in 1 John 3:15 and lust amounts to adultery in Matthew 5:28, so greed amounts to idolatry.

The Bible has given believers insider information. As Revelation 18 records, on the horizon is a major upheaval in the worldwide social and economic situation. All the currency of the world—its money, possessions, fashions, and whims—will be worthless at our death or Christ's return, both of which could be imminent. This should utterly change our investment strategy.

For us to expend our precious time and energies building up more and more wealth and possessions is foolish. In light of the inevitable future, storing vast sums of money for some day in the distance is equivalent to rushing out to hoard Confederate money on the day before Sherman took the South.

To place our hope in money, despite an awareness of its worthlessness, portrays a basic ignorance or unbelief in the Scriptures. Kingdom currency, backed by the eternal treasury, is the only medium of exchange recognized by the Son of God, whose government will last forever. The currency of His kingdom is our present faithful service and sacrificial use of our resources for Him. The payoff in eternity will be “a sure foundation,” consisting of treasures beyond our wildest dreams.

Christ has told us to keep alert (Ephesians 6:10-13). This ought to encourage Christlike living. Look at 2 Peter 3:10: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

Everything that people have spent all their time investing in will be gone. Many months ago when we were driving across the Adirondack Mountains in New York, I looked out the window and saw an old run-down house. In the front yard were three piles of stuff, plus a U-Haul. I imagined that an older couple had lived there and passed on, so their children had descended on the house to decide what to do with the things. They were carefully carrying out the antique furniture; putting things on tables for an estate sale; and the rest was put in a huge pile of trash. That elderly couple's life had been reduced to three things: trash, yard sale stuff, and things their children wanted to keep. They did not get to take any of it with them. The only thing they got to take with them is what they sent on ahead (if they sent anything at all, that is).

Although I have mentioned this previously, I want to remind you of this vital truth again: Christ said that He was going to prepare a place for us—He is building a room for each of us in His Father's house. The apostle Paul added to that by saying that we only have two categories of building materials from which our rooms will be built in heaven. Our rooms will be built out of wood, hay, and stubble—or gold, silver, and precious stones. What you and I do on earth for Christ will determine which will be used. You see, Christ is going to put all that we've done through the fire, and what is left is what we will have for eternity. Therefore, Christ said, “Don't cloud your mind with earthly interests—loving the world and all that is in it!”

Now look at 2 Peter 3:11: ... *Since all these things will be dissolved* [the world, the beauty of it, our possessions, all that we've labored for and built], *what manner of persons ought you to be*

in holy conduct and godliness ...? That question needs to be answered in each of our lives. We must decide that, above all else, we want to be characterized as pilgrims and strangers on this earth. Consider the apostle Paul, who took the gospel to the Gentiles, and wrote half of the New Testament: *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand* (2 Timothy 4:6).

That verse uses the same term as a boat shoving off. When we lived in Rhode Island, people used to take our family out on the ocean in their sailboats. There was a science to how the ropes were wrapped around the mooring. They did not want to secure it permanently, but just enough so the boat would not come loose and drift away. Paul said that he was ready to let the rope loose and sail away.

The other way verse 6 is described is breaking camp. The Roman Legionnaires who conquered the world lived in tents. Before a campaign, they would methodically set up their perimeter with their tents; soldiers would then go fight the battles. But they never drove their tent stakes too deeply in case they needed to break camp quickly. Paul did not pound his tent stakes in too deeply, so he was ready to pull them out at any moment. Materialism, however, makes us bury our tent stakes and put concrete on top. Materialism ties the mooring rope in knots. So Christ is saying, “Since the day of the Lord is coming, and everything is going to be dissolved, be careful how you live—because how you live is going to determine what your ‘forever life’ is like.”

TUESDAY: Materialism Clutters Our Lives

... looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:12–13, emphasis added).

Because materialism clutters our lives, we are so covered over with the things of life that bog us down that we fail to realize nothing here is going to last forever. That fact ought to discourage materialism and encourage us to live expectantly, as Peter said above.

Committing everything we have to Christ will make us build with fireproof materials. While we lived in California, we saw that grass fires would throw sparks on wood roofs and burn houses down. The residents there soon learned that they could not use wood shingle roofs, so they switched to tile shingles that look similar but are made of fireproof material. They are heavier, last longer, and yet they won’t burn. Scripture says that we are living on the edge of a swift fire that is racing toward us. Therefore we ought to be conscientiously building our lives with fireproof materials. All that is solely for use on earth is temporary, but anything elevated from its earthly use and given to Christ will last forever. And that is exciting!

Some people get discouraged if they can’t find a parking place, the TV isn’t working, or if they are picked on at school or at work. Now compare those small inconveniences with living every day in the dark, by torch light, in a sewer. That is what the Christians did during the great

persecutions in Rome. When I take a tour group to Rome, we visit one of the most incredible spots in the city. Next to the Coliseum, about forty feet underground, are the catacombs—the garbage and sewer system of the Coliseum. Those drainage systems provided a safe haven for the Christians because no one wanted to come after them there. At night, after their loved ones had been martyred in the games, these believers would climb up the storm sewers, push off the lid, gather up any remains, and carry them back to the catacombs to be buried in niches in the rocks.

What would keep a person going during such great tribulation? The only way to endure adversity of that nature is to not look down, but up for Christ. Now apply that to today's ominous times: I am not looking for the Antichrist or the mark of the beast—I am looking for Jesus! That is the only way you can really live abundantly in this present life.

There are those who believe that Bible prophecy is simply trying to figure out what the mark of the beast is and who is going to get it. But the Bible says that we should not be concerned with that. The whole purpose of Bible prophecy is not to sell books and make charts, but to make us expectant of Christ's return. Materialism, however, clouds our eyes so that we can't see clearly enough to look up expectantly. We must therefore learn to develop an enduringly hopeful life—and live purely: *Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless* (2 Peter 3:14).

Keep looking up because your redemption is near! That hope is why the apostle Paul said that our citizenship is in heaven, and that is why the early Christians made it through such horrific persecution.

WEDNESDAY: Materialism Clouds Our Minds and Wills

... Beware lest you ... fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked (2 Peter 3:17, emphasis added).

What happens when our minds are clouded with materialism? Our Bibles become closed! This ought to warn us to be more alert to guard our hearts and lives more maturely.

Materialism clouds our minds. If you are not careful, you won't make time for God's Word. One classic example is the impact of a television set on your stewardship of time and resources. After wasting time watching TV for hours, you must then deprogram your mind because it deadens you to God's Word. Have you ever had precious fellowship in prayer and communing with God after watching TV for three or four hours? Inviting the world into our living rooms via TV night after night simply will not enhance that type of worship. What I find in my own life is that after I spend time watching TV, I have to read the Bible to warm up my heart again.

What did Christ teach? He told us to be content. And Paul said that godliness with contentment is great gain. So be careful to not invest in the mammon of unrighteousness. Jesus warned of this happening in the Laodicean church age: *"Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and*

naked—..." (Revelation 3:17). That church represents the age in which we now live. Churches have every piece of equipment, gadgets, investment programs, online services, programs—and *closed* Bibles.

Materialism clouds our wills. Instead of collecting and holding on to things here on earth, Peter says that we are to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ...* (2 Peter 3:18). This ought to encourage us to trust God in this life and to grow spiritually.

So then, why should we avoid possessiveness and covetousness? Because that way of life will cloud our minds, clutter our lives, and keep our eyes from looking for Jesus' return. It will close the Book and distract our will from obeying Christ! Look at what a pastor from Chicago, A. W. Tozer, wrote about fifty years ago: "The man of pseudo-faith will fight for his verbal creed but refuse flatly to allow himself to get into a predicament where his future must depend upon that creed being true. He always provides himself with secondary ways of escape so he will have a way out if the roof caves in. What we need very badly these days is a company of Christians who are prepared to trust God as completely now as they know they must do at the last day."¹

As Tozer has just pointed out, most of us recognize that God says that He—the One who faithfully clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds—is to be trusted. We even say that we believe that, but, "just in case," we have a backup plan of our own. There needs to be a balance here: we are supposed to be prudent, and care for our family, but if we are trusting in material things to care for our family, then we are not trusting God.

I once met an elderly farmer in South Carolina who lived at the time when the Emergency Banking Bill of 1933 led to confiscating all gold from American citizens. He had a beautiful farm with six hundred acres. He sold it, received payment in gold, and deposited the gold in the bank—on the *very* day the law was passed! That law allowed the government to wipe out gold accounts. And every time he drove by that farm, he thought about the moment that everything his family had accumulated for years was literally destroyed.

That day is going to come again. The Scriptures say that there is going to be a cataclysmic change. So don't put all of your treasures on earth; invest in heaven instead. Christ is looking for a group of people who are willing to trust Him as much today as they are going to have to at the end! Are you a member of that group?

THURSDAY: Giving to God What Is His

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, emphasis added).

As we learned last week, God owns all things whether we recognize it or not. But life becomes much clearer, and in some respects much easier, when we consciously and continuously choose to recognize it. Have you invited Him to be what Scripture says He is—the Creator, owner, and

controller of your family, your possessions, your money, and you? And have you extended the invitation again after you have taken things back into your own hands? This self-surrender to God is the beginning of true stewardship and thus the end of being ensnared by materialism.

True Biblical Stewardship: From a proper view of God's *ownership* comes true biblical *stewardship*. If we belong to God, then we recognize that we are not owners, but stewards. Unless you travel on cruise ships you probably don't see many stewards. The term is not a common one used in our vocabulary. A steward was someone that a wealthy person had in their household who took care of their goods for them. There was never a thought that the steward was the owner or master. A steward was a slave or servant who was responsible for oversight of his master's possessions. Believers are stewards, slaves of their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, which is a wonderful privilege.

Stewardship is the giving of ourselves without reservation to the Lord. In fact, one of the conditions of discipleship is that we become stewards of Jesus for life. Early in my ministry I met a ninety-year-old pastor who was a true steward of God. After I got to know him I discovered the secret of his long and fruitful ministry—he had distilled life down to three points: **1. unrivaled love for Jesus, 2. unceasing cross bearing, and 3. unreserved surrender.** Let's go over each of these points so that you will better understand the heart of a steward.

Stewardship is unrivaled love for Christ. In Luke 14:25–26, large crowds were traveling with Jesus. These people were there for every reason: some had been healed, a few were raised from the dead, some had been fed by Jesus, and others just liked the show. So He turned to them and said, “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple*” (v. 26).

That seems like a contradiction: we are not to hate, are we? No, Jesus meant this: “If you compare the love you have for Me to the love for your family and relatives, the two cannot stand side by side. Your love for Me should be so great that the difference between the two is like love and hate.” He would never tell us to hate our families, but that our love for Him is to be so great that it appears that we do. The first part of being His steward and His disciple is that we have unrivaled love for Him. Nothing else can be on the same shelf. Many Christians claim, “Christ is first in my life,” and then put Him up there on a shelf along with everything else.

Jesus warned that our relationship with people, the world, and possessions can rival our love for Him. So He said, “*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matthew 10:37). If what your mother and father think causes you to disobey Christ, you are not worthy of Him. I am glad Jesus said that. Those may be “fighting words” to some, but that is the unrivaled love that Christ demands from us as His disciples.

All this deals with the **affections of our hearts**. Jesus said, “If you claim to love Me, but the love you have for Me is not unrivaled, you can't be My disciple.” Do the affections of your heart reflect Jesus Christ in this manner?

Stewardship is unceasing cross bearing for Christ. Jesus has already made the standard so high that it is out of reach of everybody except by the power of God. Yet He doesn't stop with unri-

valed love. He continued by saying, “*Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ... And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me*” (Luke 14:27; Matthew 10:38). In other words, Jesus did not stop with the affections of our hearts—He said there must also be unceasing cross bearing, which deals with our **conduct in life**.

Frances Ridley Havergal wrote the lines to a song we so often sing without due seriousness and commitment. It is a matter of record that this hymn was autobiographical, and I believe it well expresses the nature of cross bearing. In the third stanza she wrote: *Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne. Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.*

Jesus wants us to give Him our all! Are you unceasingly bearing your own cross? Discipleship doesn’t stop there, however. In Luke 14:33 Christ is still laying down the ground rules.

Stewardship is unreserved surrender to Christ: “... *Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple*” (Luke 14:33). Christ is in the same breath, the same setting, talking to the same people. He had already told them that they had to love Him more than anything else, and then He told them they had to take up a cross, which meant death to self. His next qualification for a disciple is the requirement to forsake all for Him. This deals with **personal possessions**.

Jesus has the right of disposal. It is not *our* money or *our* lives, because both belong to God. Discipleship is not about thinking: *I'll give God His 10 percent, and then the rest is mine*. If you keep the rest for yourself, you are keeping 90 percent of God’s money—because He owns it all. Instead, you are to be a steward of the Lord’s money, which should always be at His disposal.

Henry Parsons Crowell, the founder of the Quaker Oats Company, gave away 96 percent of his income and lived on just 4 percent. It doesn’t matter which percentage is involved, however, as all of it is God’s. You don’t get a ribbon if you give more, because Jesus says it is all His anyway. He is the owner, and we are only employees. Christ, therefore, asks that He be above all our treasures on earth, whether money or possessions. For Jesus has said, “*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*” (Matthew 19:21). The man He spoke to went away sadly. Why? Because he said what so many people say today: “God, You can have my voice, my body sometimes, my time now and then, but You are not going to have everything.” But Jesus says, “If I can’t have everything—I don’t want anything.”

A true disciple humbly acknowledges this truth: “Everything I have comes from You—and belongs to You.” Such an attitude changes us from thinking in terms of how much of *my* money should I give ... to how much of *His* money should I keep!

FRIDAY: Stewardship—Giving to God without Reservation

“... *for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood*” (Mark 12:44, emphasis added).

In *Enjoying Intimacy with God*, noted author J. Oswald Sanders has this to say about giving to God without reservation: “Whether we tithe or not tithe, our Lord’s life on Earth as a man set the standard for His disciples, and this principle applies equally to living for God and giving to God. Paul holds Him up as the supreme Example. ‘You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich’ (2 Cor. 8:9).

“Judaism was an expensive religion, and as a devout Jew, who fulfilled the whole Law, our Lord was meticulous in fulfilling its financial obligations. What would He pay into the Temple treasury from what He earned as a carpenter?

“A Jew was first required to give one-tenth to God. Then at harvest time, the farmer must give the firstfruits to God, and that consisted of one-sixth of his increase. Then every three years a second tenth was given for the poor—social security tax. In addition were the special offerings of cleansing and consecration. That means that his total contributions to religion would be nearer a fourth of his income than a tenth—and that does not include voluntary support to the local synagogues. It is not difficult to imagine the temptation in times of stringency to withhold the tithe. So here we have our answer as to how much of His income Jesus gave to God. We know that Christ fulfilled all righteousness so we know that He gave all He could.

“If we object that the Jews were under law and we Christians are under grace, and that for us the law of the tithe has been abrogated, another question arises. Will a Christian who is experiencing intimacy with his Lord wish to take advantage of grace so that he can give less to God’s work than the less privileged Jew who knew nothing of Calvary’s sacrifice and the inestimable blessings it has brought? Do you think God expects less from us? Was our Lord’s matchless generosity in becoming poor for us intended to beget stinginess in His children? Paul cited it rather as an incentive to sacrificial giving. Grace is the super abundant overflowing—Not ‘I have to give this.’ That is the Law. Grace is ‘all I am, all I have, all I’ll ever be.’”²

The people closest to Christ gave up all they had and followed Him. One might say, “That is the apostles, not us.” Such thinking is why the church is not conquering the world anymore. When has it ever done that? In the nineteenth century, through the ministry of the Cambridge Seven (C.T. Studd and friends), many students chose to give up careers in England and move to mission fields at the farthest corners of the world. They gave up their ownership of things. Through their sacrifices, the gospel went to every corner of the planet in about thirty years because England was touched with such dedicated stewardship.

A Biblical View of Tithing: “*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former*” (Matthew 23:23 NIV). Jesus said tithing was proper, and thus relevant to us. Admittedly, tithing is nowhere specifically commanded in the New Testament, since that is not the genius of God’s method under grace. Instead of legislating regulations, Jesus enunciated principles by which His disciples were to regulate their conduct. “I am not commanding you” were Paul’s words. He knew that a lavish hand without a loving heart was valueless.

The patriarchs practiced tithing four hundred years before the law was given (Genesis 14:20; 28:22). The usage of consecrated tithes prevailed among Romans, Greeks, and Arabians as well as with the Jews; so tithing seems to rest on the common law of God's kingdom rather than on special Hebrew legislation. Jesus Himself gave tithes and offerings. Is the servant greater than his Lord?

W. A. Criswell (1909 -2002), the great expository teacher for many years at First Baptist Dallas, tells the story about the pastor who was asked, "How many church members do you have?" The answer was, "One hundred fifty." The pastor was further asked, "How many of them are tithers?" The pastor replied, "One hundred fifty." In astonishment the inquirer exclaimed, "What! All one hundred fifty, the entire church, are tithers?" "Yes indeed," said the pastor. "About fifty of them bring the tithe to the storehouse, and God collects it from the rest." In the end "we do not cheat God," concludes Dr. Criswell. "I can either give it to Him in a deeply spiritual act of worship, or He can collect it. In either case, God gets His own."³

What does God truly want from us? Since no one has ever seen the Father, we need to listen to Jesus, who said: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment*" (Matthew 22:37–38). And Jesus has said that if we love Him, we will obey Him—and that includes how we handle His money, His possessions, and His time!

SATURDAY: Building a Fireproof Life

If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire ... (1 Corinthians 3:15, emphasis added).

What we have been studying in Revelation is only a foretaste of what is to come. But God has not left us without instructions. In Revelation we have seen Truth to live by for a safe future. So how do we survive in the early twenty-first century? We need to build a fireproof life. Thus, there are three truths that I want you to remember from this week so that you can truly give God what is His.

Truth 1: Jesus compares your earthly life to a building, so you must watch what you build with—and where. Jesus says to build your life with things that won't burn up: ... *As a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it 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. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are* (1 Corinthians 3:10-17).

With what are you building your life? Are you building it with wood, hay, and stubble that will burn up—or are you building your life with gold, silver, and precious stones? The gold speaks of seeking God first; the silver and precious stones speak of sacrificing your time, talents, and resources to God before they get dissipated and burned up here.

Truth 2: Jesus says your life is a stewardship, so watch where you invest it. As a faithful steward, beware of investing your life—and His money—in the pursuit of so-called “Make it rich quick!” schemes. Such scams bilk people out of millions, fold companies, and cause stock market crashes.

God is going to let everyone know once and for all who we really lived for—ourselves or for Him. He says that *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). That is decided one moment, one day, one week, one month at a time through living in the light of eternity.

Truth 3: Jesus says your life is like a race, so watch out for the rules. Know the boundaries and keep the “baggage” at a minimum. Stay within the lines, follow the rules, and be careful to not get tripped up in the race. Paul says, ... *Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ...* (Hebrews 12:1–2).

If anything trips you up in life, get rid of it—everything that holds you back and keeps getting caught so that it drags you down (like the long robes men wore in that day that they would tie up and tuck into their belt so they could run without getting tripped up). Check your life to see if you have piled up too much baggage that will prevent you from saying “YES, LORD”—yes to His will and His way. Can you really pull up stakes at any time to do God’s will, or will it interrupt your plans? God says to keep the baggage to a minimum so that you can follow Him.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul said that the Macedonians excelled in their giving because they gave of themselves first. If you have never surrendered yourself, you need to do it now. There is no substitute for giving yourself to the Lord. You will never know the joy of the grace of giving (or any other grace) until you do!

If this is your heart’s desire, I encourage you to worshipfully sing this song of dedication to the Lord.

I Surrender All

*All to Jesus, I surrender; All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live.*

*All to Jesus I surrender; Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken; Take me, Jesus, take me now.*

*All to Jesus, I surrender; Make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel the Holy Spirit, Truly know that Thou art mine.*

*All to Jesus, I surrender; Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power; Let Thy blessing fall on me.*

*I surrender all, I surrender all, all to Thee,
my blessed Savior, I surrender all.*

—Judson W. Van DeVenter, 1896

Week 41—Living Contentedly for Christ

(Revelation 18—Stewardship)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you learn to live contentedly for Christ!



SUNDAY: A Lifelong Refuge for the Weary

... I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. ... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11–13, emphasis added).

This is the last of my three-part “Life Stewardship Series.” In the first week of the series (Week 39), we learned how to give our all to God. Last week we focused on how to give God what is His in this life. Now we will learn how to live contentedly and victoriously for Christ—our Great Physician’s antidote for worldliness.

Worldliness itself can be a symptom of being totally stressed out, weary with the continual “drip, drip, drip” of the demands of living in a fast-paced society that is spinning out of control. As a result, many Christians look to distractions that will give even a moment’s reprieve from their problems. But that is not a long-term solution, and it certainly does not contribute to building a fireproof life.

If anyone should have been stressed out and weary, it was Jesus. He lived the perfect human life, yet He lived in a whirlwind of activity. He was constantly eating, walking, talking, and sleeping with twelve men who never seemed to leave Him alone. His life was so full of people and ministry that He often didn’t have a chance to stop to eat because vast crowds and desperate individuals sought him out. He was even chided, rebuked, and scoffed at by His own family.

Jesus was also the personal target of Satan, who tempted Him, tried to derail Him, and entered people to drive them to destroy Him. He was thus attacked by every demon that could be rounded up to scream at Him, thrash around in front of Him, and seek to bother Him. And through Satan’s

influence, civil and religious authorities hounded him, always plotting to catch Him and take Him off for punishment and execution.

Yet, in the midst of all that, Jesus was peaceful, calm, focused, and confidently following God's will.

How did He do that? If we follow Christ, we can find His secret. Though we can never be sinless, we can learn to let the Holy Spirit empower us to imitate Jesus' pattern for the perfect life in step with God's will. Although He lived an extremely full, busy, and demanding life, every time Jesus is seen in the Scriptures He is composed and led by the Spirit.

Jesus was God, yet He lived the perfect human life as a man. What kept that perfect life on earth so strong? It was time alone with God that rested His soul. He had cultivated the discipline of resting in His Father by being alone with Him. Jesus had learned the secret of waiting on God. His whole life reveals that intimate communion with God is needed to live a godly life full of power, under the control of God's Spirit. And He calls each of us to do the same. So you must learn to seek and find a solitary place in your life to be alone with God regularly. If you do, this is what you will find in Christ:

- Christ is your "*holy place*" and your "*righteousness*." He is the only refuge when you feel unclean, defiled, or guilty.
- Christ is your safe and strong "*shoulder*." He is the only refuge when you feel weary, exhausted, or stressed.
- Christ is your "*fellowship*." He is the only refuge when you are lonely and feel left out, left behind, homeless, or forsaken.
- Christ is your "*stronghold*" or "*fortress*." He is the only refuge when you feel helpless, fearful, and powerless.
- Christ is "*exalted*" and He is in the "*heights*." He is the only refuge when your heart darkens and you feel hopeless.
- Christ is "*separated*" and holy, made higher than the heavens. He is the only refuge when you struggle and feel so weak when you are tempted.

You will find so much more in Christ if you spend time alone with Him regularly. Instead of fleeing to the world and its enticements, flee to Jesus as your refuge from weariness!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, our hope is in You. You are our refuge. Although You do not remove the difficulties of life, You just make it so much sweeter in those times when we flee to You. For there in Your embrace we find hope and joy and peace and strength to go on—and to go back and to endure until You come or call. May we do that in Your glorious name, the name that is above every name. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

MONDAY: Finding Christ

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

Jesus promises that if we come to Him, we will find a resting place in a friend on whom we can lay our burdens. A new believer typically asks, “Can I hold out?” God compassionately replies, “I will hold you, My child!” The Lord Jesus is our strong and loving Savior.

Because most Christians can find no rest trying to live life their way instead of God’s, they become weary of the daily grind. What are some common roots for weariness?

First, we are weary because of the **change and stress** which derail us from seeking God’s promised rest: “... *In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength ...*” (Isaiah 30:15).

Consider these comments on the subject of change and stress: “Here’s the problem: While choices multiply, we stay pretty much the same. Our bodies and minds remain the bottleneck through which choice must pass. We still have the same brains our forebearers did, still only twenty-four hours a day to use them. We still need time and energy to listen, look, absorb, distinguish, and decide. The opportunity to choose among many options is, of course, a good thing. But maybe you can have too much of a good thing? Even of choice itself? Each choice saps energy, takes time, makes a big deal out of what isn’t.”¹

Secondly, we are weary because of the **ceaseless pressures of debt** that rob our taking advantage of God’s promised rest.² God says, “*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).

Today our lives are addictively intertwined in the economic system, and the credit-debt mentality has been fully normalized. Someone has described a modern American as a person “who drives a credit union-financed car over a bond-financed highway on credit card gas to open a charge account at a department store so he can fill his bank-financed home with installment-purchased furniture.”³

Thirdly, we are weary because the **hurry and rush** surrounding us always displaces God’s time for us to rest. Even our sentences are peppered with such words as *time crunch, fast food, rush hour, frequent flyer, expressway, overnight delivery, and rapid transit*. The products and services we use further attest to our hurry: We pull in our speeding cars for gas and snacks at **QuikTrip**, send packages overnight by **Federal Express**, talk while we do other things on a cell phone service called **Sprint**, manage our personal finances on **Quicken**, schedule our appointments on a **DayRunner**, diet with **SlimFast**, and even buy swimming gear made by **Speedo**.

“Yes, the world is going faster. And yes, we in turn are also going faster. But the important question no one asks is this: When does faster become too fast? Is there a speed limit to life? What happens when we exceed it? Does God give us a ticket? I have thought long and hard about the issue of speed, and have come to believe that it is as much responsible for the problem of personal and societal dysfunction as any other single factor. Virtually all of our relationships

are damaged by hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions.”⁴

Rest for our souls is the great necessity of our spiritual lives! We need to be alone with God daily. We need to find times to get away alone. We need to get up early if necessary. Few of us are called to spend many hours in daily prayer, but *all* of us must spend *some* time. If it is impossible when the family is awake, pray before they get up. If you have no place you can do this at home, find a place to park your car on the way to work and pray in the anonymity of the passing traffic. However you do this is up to you, but you need to make time to find Christ who is the refuge for the weary!

TUESDAY: Respond to Christ

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29, emphasis added).

From these verses, we can easily see how Jesus is the refuge for the weary. Note the three imperatives: come, take, and learn. There is no sheep of Jesus’ pasture that He doesn’t invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers His perfect rest to us. Jesus said, “I am the answer. Come to Me!” This is salvation. Rest for the weary starts with salvation because the lost (and disobedient believers) have no rest in their sin. Restlessness is their lifestyle: *But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked”* (Isaiah 57:20–21).

In God’s Word, listening to Christ is listening to the Holy Spirit, and that means obeying the Word of God. Jesus called for us to completely turn unto Him as the way to live life. Now look at the bold second half of Matthew 11:28: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (emphasis added). This sounds so beautiful in the word-for-word rendering of the Greek. Here is each word in order of the text: *Come toward Me all the ones laboring and the ones having been packed, and I will rest you.* This calls for us to admit that something is wrong. We have to acknowledge our need. Therefore, Jesus calls for those who are overloaded—“all the ones laboring and the ones having been packed”—to come to Him.

Is life itself a laborious effort for you? Do you feel packed in, and piled so high, that you can’t take another step? Then Jesus says, “You need to listen to Me.” How can you best do that? By getting to the root of the problem.

Dr. Robert Swenson has expressed modern society’s problem as OVERLOAD. Today, we will cover the first part of a diagnostic test that can help you discern whether you are suffering from this deadly condition called “overload.” As you read, carefully think about whether or not you have any of these symptoms (most people do!).⁵

We allow our lives to have activity overload. We book our lives weeks into the future, and often in the desire to be more efficient, we book several things into the same time period.

"Activity overload takes away the pleasure of anticipation and the delight of reminiscence." God says: "Stop! Hold still so that you can know Me." (See Psalm 46:10.)

We allow our lives to have change overload. "Nothing defines our age more than the furious and relentless increase in the rate of change," summarizes historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. For thousands of years of recorded history change came in a slow, controlled, and understandable rate, but now we are brutally jerked forward at warp speed—whether we like it or not. God says, "Seek out the old paths where you can find rest for your soul!" (See Jeremiah 6:16.)

We allow our lives to have commitment overload. Most of us make more commitments than we have time to give them. In his great book, *Balancing Life's Demands*, Dr. J. Grant Howard says, "Some people can't say no. They take on too many relationships and too many responsibilities. They enroll in too many courses, hold down too many jobs, volunteer for too many tasks, make too many appointments, serve on too many committees, have too many friends. They are trying to be all things to all men all at once all by themselves!"⁶ God says, "Seek Me most—seek me with all your heart." (See Psalm 27:4.)

We allow our lives to have choice overload. In the 1970s there were 11,767 items in the average supermarket; in the 1990s the number passed 30,000. In 2005, that number has risen to over 45,000!⁷ This includes over 186 different choices of breakfast cereal alone! And for entertainment, you can get a satellite dish that offers 1,500 movie choices per month! Futurist Allan Toffler warns, "We are in fact, racing toward 'over-choice'."⁸ God says, "Choose whom and what you will serve with all your heart." (See Joshua 24:15; James 1:8.)

We allow our lives to have competition overload. It is part of the American dream. To compete is American, and it is therefore constantly emphasized in school, business, and athletics—but is it spiritually healthy? God says, "Jesus taught a non-aggressive, non-self-asserting, non-self-promoting lifestyle for His children in the Sermon on the Mount." (Read His Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1–8.)

What different counsel we get from man! J. B. Phillips (1906–1982) illustrates this when he alters the Beatitudes to read as follows:

1. Happy are the "pushers": for they get on in the world.
2. Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them.
3. Happy are they who complain: for they get their own way in the end.
4. Happy are the blasé: for they never worry over their sins.
5. Happy are the slave drivers: for they get results.
6. Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world: for they know their way around.
7. Happy are the troublemakers: for they make people take notice of them.⁹

We allow our lives to have debt overload. From the White House to the bungalow on your street, most of America is awash in red ink. It is debilitating and unbiblical! God says, "Do not steal, nor hold on to another's possessions more than love would allow." Look at Romans 13:8: *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

Does *Owe no one anything* refer primarily to the Christian's financial practices? Some people believe that it does, and that it is a sin to have a debt.

J. Hudson Taylor, the godly missionary to China, would never incur a debt, basing his conviction on this verse. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, had the same conviction. "However, the Bible does not forbid borrowing or legal financial transactions that involve interest. What the Bible does forbid is the charging of high interest, robbing the brethren, and failing to pay honest debts (see Ex. 22:25–27; Neh. 5:1–11). Matthew 25:27 and Luke 19:23 indicate that banking and investing for gain are not wrong. Certainly no one should get into unnecessary debt, or sign contracts he cannot maintain. "Thou shalt not steal." But to make Romans 13:8 apply to all kinds of legal obligations involving money is, to me, stretching a point."¹⁰

We allow our lives to have decision overload. "Every day we have more tough decisions to make and less time to do it in. The trivial ones are objectionable just because of how many there are [what flavor, which topping, mint or tartar control, low fat, low sodium, diet or regular ...] But we also are facing new choices generations past never dreamed of: whether or not to wait to have children; whether to move and change jobs; whether both dad *and* mom should work outside the home; whether we should put grandma in the home or not. Too many decisions trivial or not in too short a time is vintage overload."¹¹

God says, "Bring each decision in life to Me. Wait for Me to lead, and don't be in a hurry to just go on through life your own way—and thus miss My blessing and My leading." (See Proverbs 3:5–6.)

We allow our lives to have hurry overload. "Haste is a modern ailment. It is also fashionably American. Our lives are nonstop, lived at a breathless pace. We walk fast, talk fast, eat fast and then excuse our selves by saying, 'I must run.'"¹² Alexander Solzhenitsyn once said that hastiness and superficiality were the psychic diseases of the twentieth century. God says, "Wait patiently for Me. Don't run ahead and don't lag behind. Walk in step with My Spirit." (See Psalm 37:7–9; Galatians 5:16, 24.)

Have you spotted any symptoms so far of this deadly condition called overload? If so, I encourage you to pray about each of them, asking the Lord to continue to open your eyes to areas in your life that need His gentle touch.

WEDNESDAY: How to Unload Your Life

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ...; but lay up ... treasures in heaven For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19–21, emphasis added).

Yesterday was the first part of a diagnostic test that can help us detect the symptoms of overload. Two remain, which I'll cover today, and then share God's simple solution for getting out from under such a deadly burden. So then, what are some other ways that we have let ourselves become entrapped in the overload syndrome?

We allow our lives to have possession overload. We have more “things per person” than any other nation in history. Closets are full, storage space is used up, and cars can’t fit into garages. Having first imprisoned us with debt, possessions then take over our houses and occupy our time. This begins to sound like an invasion. Everything I own owns me in return as I become responsible to care for it, maintain it, clean it, insure it, store it, update it, and so forth. So why would I want more? God says, “Beware of having so much in life that the care of things makes your heart grow cold toward Me.” (See Matthew 13:22; Luke 12:21; 1 Timothy 6:8–10; Hebrews 13:5.)

We allow our lives to have media overload. Did you know that a single edition of the *New York Times* magazine has more information than a seventeenth-century Britisher would have encountered in a lifetime? We live in an era of information overload! Solomon, whom God says is the wisest man who ever lived, had this to say at the end of his life: ... *Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh* (Ecclesiastes 12:12). I like John MacArthur’s comment on that verse: “Books written on any other subject than God’s revealed wisdom will only proliferate the uselessness of man’s thinking.”¹³

But an even more damaging effect than being constantly bombarded with information in books is the power of TV, movies, and games. Ninety-nine percent of Americans have a TV in their homes; the average U.S. home has two, and both are blaring seven hours a day. Such distraction robs us of depth, neutralizes the benefits of meditation, and encourages restlessness.

In contrast to time spent on the information-overload treadmill, how well do you know God? How much depth is there in your personal relationship with Him? For instance, do you know His Word as well as you know your favorite hobby or sport? That is the danger of information overload—our minds become full of so much that does not matter to God or for eternity. *God says, “To know Me, you must guard your heart.”* (See Isaiah 33:14b-17.)

Spending regular time alone with God is the only way that you will ever get to see “the King in His beauty.” You will never find God’s best for your life while drowning in the overload syndrome. Remember what wise old Solomon concluded after his quest to find the meaning of life: ... *Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil* (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

This passage, “Solomon’s final word on the issues raised in [Ecclesiastes], as well as life itself, focus on one’s relationship to God. All of the concern for a life under the sun, with its pleasures and uncertainties, was behind Solomon. Such things seemed comparatively irrelevant to him as he faced the end of his life. But death, in spite of the focused attention he had given to it in Ecclesiastes, was not the greatest equalizer as Solomon saw it, for God will bring every person’s every act to judgment. Unbelievers will stand at the Great White throne judgment (cf. Rev. 20:11–15) and believers before Christ at the Bema judgment (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10–15; 2 Cor. 5:9,10). When all is said and done, the certainty and finality of retribution give life the meaning for which David’s oft-times foolish son had been searching. Whatever may be one’s portion in life, accountability to the God, whose ways are often mysterious, is both eternal and irrevocable.”¹⁴

What an appropriate reminder for living in the end times when time is so short!

Submit to Christ's rule. It would be the rare person who did not spot any symptoms of the "overload syndrome" in his or her own life. But the good news is this: you can find relief and rest for your soul by obedience to Christ's command: "*Take My yoke upon you ...*" (Matthew 11:29). The yoke is a universal sign of submission. The Bible begins and ends with the call to submit to Christ. From Adam and Eve in Genesis to the end of the age in Revelation, Scripture tells us that we are to obey God—or face the consequences along with those who rebel and come under God's endless wrath forever.

Have you given obedience to God the highest place in your life, as the inspiration for every action and motivation? If you yield to the searching of the Holy Spirit, you may find that you have never given Him total submission, or that you have somehow, over time, taken it back. I exhort you therefore to go before the Spirit in prayer and ask Him to show you: how defective the Christian life is where obedience doesn't rule all; how that life can be exchanged for one of full surrender to absolute obedience; and how sure it is that God in Christ will enable us to live it out!¹⁵ So ask yourself: *Does submitting to God take the highest place in my life?*

Become Christ's lifelong disciple: "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ... and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matthew 11:29, emphasis added). Cling to Jesus that you may obey His admonition to "*learn from Me.*" Surround yourself with His true Word. Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the Old Testament, the meek are those wholly relying on God, rather than their own strength, to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time. (See Isaiah 41:17; Luke 18:1–8.)

Gentleness, or meekness, is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over any situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will (Galatians 5:23). Are you a gentle spirit—or one who is wrapped up in self?

THURSDAY: Christ's Promised Refuge for the Weary

"... I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29–30, emphasis added).

As we continue our study of how to apply Matthew 11:28–30 to learning to live contentedly and victoriously for Christ, we have come to the part where we get to find out how to enjoy Christ's promised refuge for the weary. What a blessing!

Everything that Jesus did was in submission to knowing and doing the will of God. This included:

Jesus' purpose in life: "... '*Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God*'" (Hebrews 10:7). Do you want God's will more than your own plans?

Jesus' delight in life: “... *My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work*” (John 4:34). Are the things of earth more delightful to you than the truth of God?

Jesus' patience in life: “*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require*” (Psalm 40:6). Are you patient enough to let God choose what is best? Remember: God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him!

Jesus' priority in life: “... *I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me*” (John 6:38). Are you dying to self daily so that you are alive unto Christ in the Spirit?

Jesus' attitude in life: “*Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42). Are you humbly whispering daily to Jesus: “Not my will, but Yours, be done”?

Again, I remind you: Jesus is the refuge for the weary. There is no sheep of His pasture that He doesn't invite to find rest in Him. He seeks us, finds us, and offers His perfect rest to us. As the world around us accelerates, our energies wane. But we are not defenseless victims. Fleeing to Jesus as your refuge will replace frenzy with peace and rest!

Find stillness as you bow before God: *Be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10). Before hurrying past that profound command, stop and consider it in your mind. The scene is one of stillness and quietness, listening and waiting before Him. That is largely a foreign experience in these busy times. Nevertheless, knowing God deeply and intimately requires such discipline. Silence before Him is indispensable if we hope to add depth to our spiritual lives.

Offer yourself in surrender to God. This is done by trusting the Lord completely as you exercise the discipline of surrender. There is a wonderfully challenging book by the founder of Wheaton College, Dr. Raymond Edman. Nothing better describes the give-and-take struggle of our early years as a Christian. They are words from a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions:

*When thou wouldest guide me
I control myself.
When thou wouldest be sovereign
I rule myself.
When thou wouldest take care of me
I suffice myself.
When I should depend on thy providings
I supply myself.
When I should submit to thy providence
I follow my will.
When I should study, honor, trust thee,
I serve myself;*

*I fault and correct thy laws
to suit myself,
Instead of thee I look to
Man's approbation,
And am by nature an idolater.
Lord, it is my chief design to bring my
heart back to thee.¹⁶*

Prepare for true worship.¹⁷ The answer to the problem begins with Saturday preparation. “(Any men who interpret the following as women’s work are wrong. Both husband and wife should share responsibility for the practical and spiritual preparations for the Lord’s Day.) It is advisable that young families have their clothing clean and laid out on Saturday night, and even that the breakfast be decided upon. The whereabouts of Bibles and lessons should be known, and even better, ought to be collected and ready. There should be an agreed-upon time to get up which leaves plenty of time to get ready for church. Going to bed at a reasonable hour is also a good idea. Spiritually, prayer about the Lord’s Day is essential—prayer for the service, the music, the pastors, one’s family, and oneself.”¹⁸

Cultivate the discipline of simplicity in your life. You can do this by reordering your private world.

The Decision:	The Discipline:
To reorder one’s private world	Simplicity
To be still	Silence
To cultivate serenity	Solitude
To trust the Lord completely	Surrender

FRIDAY: Enjoying Jesus—Your Refuge from Weariness

Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved (Psalm 62:1–2, emphasis added).

Fleeing to Jesus as your refuge will help you have the genuine expectancy of God’s presence. A knowledge of God through His Word ought to heighten your expectations and instill healthy fear and reverence. As Annie Dillard wrote: “On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the Catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? ... It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing

crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”²⁰

Fleeing to Jesus as your refuge will help you preserve your experience of the depths of God in your life. How can you preserve your heart for the Lord’s Day? “Edith Schaeffer tells how, when living in Villars, Switzerland, the church bells would toll every Saturday at 4:30 P.M. as a reminder to prepare for the Lord’s Day. The bells were ignored by most but were a poignant reminder of a more enlightened day.”²¹

Is Christ like a “city of refuge” to you? Do you find Him easy to reach? Are His arms open to you? Do you see His entrance as never locked, and that He is a completely sufficient refuge? Do you see that there is no other hope but Him? Then He is *your* blessed refuge! (If you would like to study the wonderful truths of this facet of Jesus, see the “Christ Our Refuge” MP3 CD description in the resources listed at the back of this book.)

How can you start cultivating the practice of fleeing to Christ’s promised refuge for the weary? Jesus demonstrated that as being our priority, but where do we start? We simply begin by making it a precious habit to read God’s Word every day. Remember to faithfully follow the adage I mentioned earlier in this book: No Bible—no breakfast; no Bible—no bed.

Rest for your soul comes most readily by reading God’s Word. This is the voice of God, and we must listen. No Christian can lead a Spirit-filled life full of power without regularly reading the Bible. Our minds are such that we do not retain what we need to know. They need to be refreshed again and again—which includes memorizing and meditating upon God’s Word regularly!

SATURDAY: Rest at Last!

Blessed is the man [whose] ... delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. ... And whatever he does shall prosper (Psalm 1:1–3, emphasis added).

Why is meditating upon the Word so very important? Meditation brings us immediately into the intimate presence of God. Few are willing to pay the price, but for those who do, the rewards are great!

I believe Mrs. Nguyen Thi An (a fictitious name) learned the art of fleeing to Jesus as her refuge in weariness. She is a glorious example of how to live contentedly and victoriously for Christ—regardless of the circumstances. Though she has lost everything, she has all things in One. Her husband, her home, and her belongings were all taken away, yet the Vietnamese could not take her contentment.

Mrs. An’s husband was a pastor in Vietnam. When police closed their church, he was thrown into prison. Without official papers, she and her children were evicted from their apartment, but her faith forged a sanctuary out of her surroundings, from which she greets us:

My Dear Friends,

... You know around here we are experiencing hardships, but we thank the Lord He is comforting us and caring for us in every way. When we experience misfortune, adversity, distress and hardship, only then do we see the real blessing of the Lord poured down on us in such a way that we cannot contain it.

We have been obliged recently to leave our modest apartment and for over two months have been living on a balcony. The rain has been beating down and soaking us. Sometimes in the middle of the night we are forced to gather our blankets and run to seek refuge in a stairwell.

Do you know what I do then? I laugh and I praise the Lord, because we can still take shelter in the stairwell. I think of how many people are experiencing much worse hardships than I am. Then I remember the words of the Lord, "To the poor, O Lord, You are a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat" (cp. Isaiah 25:4), and I am greatly comforted....

Our Father ... is the One who according to the Scriptures does not break the bruised reed nor put out the flickering lamp. He is the One who looks after the orphan and the widow. He is the One who brings blessings and peace to numberless people.

I do not know what words to use in order to describe the love that the Lord has shown our family. I only can bow my knee and my heart and offer to the Lord words of deepest thanks and praise. Although we have lost our house and our possessions, we have not lost the Lord, and He is enough. With the Lord I have everything. The only thing I would fear losing is His blessing!

Could I ask you and our friends in the churches abroad to continue to pray for me that I will faithfully follow the Lord and serve Him regardless of what the circumstances may be? As far as my husband is concerned, I was able to visit him this past summer. We had a 20-minute conversation that brought us great joy....

I greet you with my love.

Mrs. Nguyen Thi An²²

Learn from Mrs. An's wonderful example of how to live contentedly and victoriously in Christ. And then flee on your own to Jesus as your eternal and secure refuge!

Make a choice to live in hope. I pray that over the past three weeks you have made the choice to live in hope by giving your all to God, giving God what is His in this life, and committing to learn how to live contentedly and victoriously for Christ! May God, through the Holy Spirit, grant the empowerment to embrace as a lifestyle 1 Timothy 6's seven keys to biblical contentment:

1. Remember that things are only temporary (vv. 6–7).
2. Only seek necessities—wait for the rest (v. 8).

3. Avoid a consuming desire for prosperity (vv. 9–10).
4. Flee materialism (v. 11).
5. Cling to eternal life (vv. 12–16).
6. Fix your hope on God (v. 17).
7. Give until it hurts (v. 18).

As you follow the above path faithfully, you will experience Jesus' peace that passes understanding, and you can thus experientially sing all the words to this beautiful song.

Like a River Glorious

*Like a river glorious Is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious In its bright increase;
Perfect, yet it floweth fuller every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth Deeper all the way.
Hidden in the hollow Of His blessed hand.
Never foe can follow, Never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, Not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.*

*Every joy or testing comes from God above.
Given to His children As an act of love;
We may trust Him fully All for us to do—
Those who trust Him wholly Find Him wholly true.*

Refrain:

*Trusting in Jehovah, Hearts are fully blest—
Finding, as He promised, Perfect peace and rest.*

—Francis Ridley Havergal

Week 42—Look for the Returning Jesus

(Revelation 19:1–10)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you look for the returning Jesus!



SUNDAY: Home at Last

“... Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11, emphasis added).

Are you getting ready for the ultimate banquet? The greatest party of all time is approaching! The King of Kings, the Lord of the universe, is preparing a wedding feast like none other! In the most breathtaking location imaginable, He is spreading an immense table. The greatest names of all times will be present and seated. At dinner the invited guests will be rubbing shoulders with Adam and his lovely wife, Eve. One of their twin sons, Abel, will be sitting with them as well as Seth and his wife. Not too far away will be the amazing preacher, the earliest known prophet, Enoch and family. His great grandson Noah and family will be nearby. On down the long table, lavishly set, will be the likes of Job and clan, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—with all their various family members. What a reunion as Moses and Elijah walk around talking with guests and visiting with old friends!

Further on, Jeremiah sits in rapt attention with Daniel and Isaiah as Ezekiel points out again the wonders they see about the Banquet Hall—angelic creatures moving about, choirs of angels singing, and the brilliance of the galaxies radiating the glory of God shining down upon the gathered saints. Interspersed with all these Old Testament saints will be multitudes of beaming faces well known to us. Matthew and the rest of the twelve will be at the entrances to the twelve gates that the guests will stream through on their way to be seated at the banquet. Paul, at one gate, is weeping for joy as he finally sees so many of his spiritual children and grandchildren. Because he died before many of them had grown up, it is a very precious reunion. At another gate, John also weeps for joy as he returns to this place he saw from Patmos.

Saints of all the ages are taking their places; a name card with a special name (uniquely theirs, and known only by them and their Savior) marks each seat.

And then the party begins. With glorious enraptured souls the hallelujahs begin to echo down the aisles of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Expectantly, each guest, personally invited by Jesus, looks up. And then they see Jesus, the glorious and majestic Savior, as He comes to each, calling them by name, extending His nail-scarred hands, and touching them with His love. We have come to the culmination of the desires of all hearts of all saints of all time. It is the wedding banquet, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and it is the scene of Revelation 19 when those who have loved Him, and waited all their lives for Him, honor Jesus. It is the assembly of those who have and love the testimony of Jesus.

The first ten verses of Revelation 19, which we will cover this week, have these very glorious themes: **The Celebration** (vv. 1–6) and **The Consummation** (vv. 7–10). There are four hallelujahs in the first six verses, and in verse 7 a calling to the celebration starts. If verses 1–6 are the celebration *preparation*, then verses 7–10 are the *consummation* of all that God has promised.

It is hard to put these things on a time-line chart, however. God knows the end from the beginning. What that means is that when you are God, and you are outside and above time, the beginning of Creation, the present time, and the consummation of all things are all equally happening at the same time. We are linear: when we try to illustrate time, we draw a straight line and mark events on it. But to God, past, present, and future occur all at the same time—the end and the beginning are all equally before Him. If you think about it, in a very real sense, that means that at this banquet Enoch, Paul, and the people at the end of the Tribulation will all get there at the same time we do. Chronologically, it is different times; but in eternity it is all happening at the same time. Thus, John was actually seeing these events because everything is unfolding before God simultaneously. Amazing!

In physics, time is a different dimension than space and matter. There is something beyond that that the scientists cannot quite quantify—and it is God. I believe that everyone is going to get to the banquet table at the same time. That is why I don't believe that the bride of Christ refers to only the church; I believe it encompasses all the saints of all time. The Bible never specifically says that the bride is the church, only that the church is an espoused virgin and is going to be married (1 Corinthians 11:2), like Ephesians 5 says. Israel is His wife, but the saints are all collectively coming to the marriage supper and will be married to the Lord in Christ. What these verses picture is a marvelous event!

God does not distinguish between pre-Flood saints, pre-Abrahamic saints, pre-Mosaic saints, pre-New Testament saints, pre-Tribulation saints, pre-millennial saints, and pre-eternity saints. In heaven, there is one great merger of them all.

As you reflect upon the prayer below, imagine that you are at that banquet even now and think of the delights you shall soon experience with Jesus.

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, the love that sent Your Son to die the most cruel and humiliating death imaginable to pay the penalty for our sin is beyond*

comprehension! Now, not only are we going to be able to get to heaven, but also You are preparing a banquet for all Your saints to celebrate with the One who loved us and gave himself for us. You are going to allow us to be married to our Savior forever! Oh, Father, we do not understand the concept of spiritual union with You, the awesome God of the universe. But what we can understand is that it is going to be glorious, and that there is something we need to do here to get ready for that wedding—to make sure that we have the appropriate attire. We pray that Your Spirit would touch our hearts with the fact that with every day that goes by, the marriage celebration is getting closer. And it is such a special day that we ought to be sure that we are getting ready. We ask that You would bless our hearts through Your Word this week, and may we respond in a pleasing manner to You. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

MONDAY: A Celebration of Jesus' Salvation and Judgment

... I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor 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” (Revelation 19:1–2, emphasis added).

What we are going to see in Revelation 19:1–6 is God's greatest celebration of all the ages. Verse 1 starts off with “Alleluia!”—which is the same word as “hallelujah.” There are 144 mentions of this word in the Bible; four of these are in verses 1–6. Seventy-six are in the Psalms where it says “may God be praised”; sixty-four occur in the rest of the Bible. “Alleluia”—meaning “Praise God”—is an imperative.

Each “alleluia” in these celebration verses is related to one of these themes: a celebration of Jesus our **SALVATION** (v. 1); a celebration of Jesus the **JUDGMENT** (vv. 2–3); a celebration of Jesus we **WORSHIP** (vv. 4–5); and a celebration of Jesus our **SOVEREIGN** (v. 6).

A Celebration of Jesus Our SALVATION: ... *I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor, and power belong to the Lord our God!”* (Revelation 19:1). This is the first celebration of salvation because Babylon, the false worship of God in world religions, has been overthrown; materialism and Satan's kingdom have also been overthrown. Finally, as God is gathering all to the banquet table, salvation is celebrated.

We should recognize that, all through the ages, each saint has been saved the same way. I am saved because I personally looked back and believed that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God—who bore the pain and paid the price of my sins with His own blood on the cross. Adam, Enoch, Job, and Abraham all looked forward to that same Lamb of God—the One who would come as a sin offering. All of us who are redeemed believe in a substitutionary atonement. They looked forward to the cross, and we look back. The people in the Tribulation and Millennium will look even further back to the substitute. All who are saved say, “I cannot save

myself; someone paid the price in my place, and that was God in human flesh, the Lamb, Jesus Christ." That is what is complete here: He has brought His redeemed to be with Him, and He is now there in their presence.

Here is why it is so hard to make a time-line chart of this: do the events in chapter 19 verses 1–10 (heaven exalts over Babylon) have to happen before verse 11 (Christ on a white horse)? What is absolutely remarkable is that John is seeing these events from God's perspective. We know that they are going to happen precisely as God wants them to happen, but Revelation cannot be charted well. Why is that? As soon as my chart doesn't match your chart, you won't listen anymore due to human nature. As 19:10 tells us, this book was written to draw us to worship Christ, and this banquet does too. This is a celebration of His salvation completed, and at this point we will forever be in the presence of God and the saints of all times!

How can all that take place before the Millennium is over? From God's perspective, no one is going to be late; that is why I believe that everyone gets to the banquet at the same time. Yes, those who are already dead are absent from the body and present with the Lord. How does that work? I don't know. I am not God, and I can't figure that one out. But I do know that Scripture assures us that those who die are immediately in the presence of Christ. I also know from Scripture that the Old Testament saints before the cross went to a place of waiting for the presence of Christ. When Jesus finished His work on the cross, He went and got them, and took them to live in His presence. And I know that all the people in the future, who have not yet trusted in Christ, are going to have to do that. Do what? God is not going to let anybody be late and miss this great event. He will work it out, so you needn't worry; just file the matter in your "too hard to understand" folder—and trust Him!

A Celebration of Jesus the JUDGMENT: *"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!"* (Revelation 19:2–3).

Praise God! Jesus has judged the harlot—the false religions of the world that corrupted the church. Is this celebration proper? Isn't it fascinating that hell is talked about at this banquet? To God, it is not distasteful to talk about hell. You can praise God that the same One who promises that our lives will be endless also promises that the judgment of the unrighteous will be eternal. To us, it is hard to understand the two at the same time. It is too awful to contemplate. But God is just and righteous, and He says, "I have so freely offered this salvation that if some reject the offer, it is righteous that I judge them forever." If you struggle with that, as I think all of us do, look at these verses: Psalm 104:35; Romans 12:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 10:30.

As Psalm 104:35 reveals, when you worship God, part of the worship should thank God for His sacrifice; the other part should thank Him that He is going to condemn sinners who refuse His free gift of salvation to eternal destruction. Romans 3:5 asks, ... *Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? NO—God is just.*

So then, the answer to whether it is proper to celebrate God's judgment is repeatedly yes. As He said at the overthrow of Sodom: *"Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righ-*

teous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25).

TUESDAY: A Celebration to Worship Our Sovereign Jesus

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” (Revelation 19:4–5, emphasis added).

A Celebration of Jesus We WORSHIP: The twenty-four elders may represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles. The twelve foundations of heaven are the apostles, and the twelve gates are the twelve tribes. All of the Scriptures were written through the Jews, and the apostles were the foundation writers of Jesus Christ’s gospel of the church; these two groups of twelve merged together. The four living creatures represent all the angels that worship God. They are the ones saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” That is a celebration of worship. But the number twenty-four is only used in Scripture when it relates to priests; so the church plus Israel’s twelve and the apostle’s twelve may speak of all of us as Christ’s priests in worship.

The “*voice that came from the throne*” could be God speaking, or a voice He creates out of the throne. “His servants and those who fear him, both small and great” are bondservants—those who will be in heaven, at the marriage supper, and those who will enjoy God forever. These are His servants, and His servants worship Him. Worship and bowing before Him acknowledge that God is who He said He is, and thus obedience is His due. A bondservant is someone who does what the master says. Those who are going to be in heaven are those who have given themselves up to do the will of God.

What is a servant? The Greek word for “servant”¹ is *doulos*, which means “a slave, bondman, man of servile condition; one who gives himself up to another’s will; devoted to another to the disregard of one’s own interests.” In Philippians 2:7 we see that Christ’s servants have His mind; in Colossians 4:12 they are prayerfully minded servants; and in 2 Timothy 2:24 they are gently minded servants—God’s servants who don’t strive and fight to get their way.

The transformed slaves of God will be there to celebrate worshiping Him. He longs for servants whose hearts well up and say, “God, You are who You say You are! I believe that, bow my life before You, and joyfully want to do whatever You say!” Sometimes we all struggle with obedience, but the direction of our lives should be toward greater service to Jesus Christ—because this is what we are going to do forever.

Do you recall the parable of the ten virgins? They were waiting for the groom to come for them. While he was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. At midnight they heard the announcement that he had arrived. The five wise virgins arose and took oil in their vessels with their lamps; the five foolish virgins were not prepared, and their lamps went out. As a result, the foolish ones were not allowed into the wedding because they didn’t have any oil for their lamps.

Bible scholars often say “oil” is the Holy Spirit. But oil here does not mean the Holy Spirit because the oil is to be purchased, and the Holy Spirit cannot be purchased. What may fit here is that the burning oil represents their Spirit-energized lives—being and living in righteousness as visible saints of God. They could put on an act for a while, but they eventually ran out of oil and never purchased more. (They never were actually living in righteousness and doing good works.) So when they came to the door, their lamps were out; there were no good works in their lives and they are excluded from heaven even though they thought they were going there. If you are saved, you will do good works, which prove that you are going to heaven. There are a lot of foolish people in the church today whose lamps are out. They are not consumed with the desire to be righteous, and to live out Christ’s righteousness. When the Bridegroom comes, they are going to be locked out.

Jesus spent all of His ministry warning people who think they are going to heaven but are not, because they are not doing what He said (see Matthew 7:21–23). These people believe that He is Lord by their words, but their works do not flow from a personal relationship with Christ. Who will get in and spend eternity with Christ and God the Father and the Holy Spirit and all the redeemed of all times? Those who do His will. The person Jesus was speaking of most clearly was Judas. He is the prime example. Judas prophesied and preached in Jesus’ name; he cast out demons and did other wonders. But Jesus will look at him, and all the other Judases that have filled the church since, and He will say, “*I never knew you*” (Matthew 7:21–28). How do you know if you know Him? Your works will determine your destiny. They won’t get you into heaven, but the nature of your works, if driven by the Spirit, will show that you are going to heaven. That is the catastrophic problem now—people perceive that they can be saved without having transformed lives. Jesus said that those at the marriage supper have transformed lives. That is the message of Revelation.

A Celebration of Jesus Our SOVEREIGN: “... *Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!*” (Revelation 19:6). Jesus is above all: all things are through Him, and to Him, and for His glory! What is this attribute of our God? Isaiah 40 clearly develops His absolute sovereignty. What is His name? The Old Testament name *Shaddai*² (used 48 times) means “the all-sufficient God, the God who is enough.” In the New Testament, God is called “the Almighty” ten times (nine times in Revelation and once in 2 Corinthians 6:14). It is the key word for God in the book of Job as he discovers in all his struggles that “God is the God who is enough.”

As you contemplate His glorious sovereignty, doesn’t it just make you want to burst forth and sing: “All hail the pow’r of Jesus’ name! Let angels prostrate fall; bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all: bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all”? I hope that is your spirit, because if it isn’t, you will feel out of place at the ultimate wedding banquet.

WEDNESDAY: The Consummation—The Wedding Banquet

*"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 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." And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"* (Revelation 19:7–10, emphasis added).

Look at verse seven above. The result of the elements we have looked at is this: we should be glad and rejoice and give Him glory because the marriage of the Lamb has come! His wife has made herself ready. You cannot get ready for heaven in heaven. We are talking about your time on earth—choices you have made and are going to make. If you are the wife-to-be of Jesus Christ, at that moment you are going to be shown for what you did to get ready.

We can learn how to get ready for that great day by understanding how royal weddings were celebrated in the ancient Near East. In that culture, a wedding feast was inseparable from the wedding, which involved a weeklong series of meals and festivities, and was the highlight of all social life. For a royal wedding such as the one Jesus mentions here, the celebration often lasted for several weeks. Guests were invited to stay at the house of the groom's parents for the entire occasion, and the father would make as elaborate provisions as he could afford. A royal wedding, of course, would be held in the palace, and a king would be able to afford whatever he desired.

A wedding feast that a king prepared for his son would be a feast of all feasts, and Jesus was therefore picturing the most elaborate celebration imaginable. The fact that it was a wedding celebration was incidental to the purpose of the parable in Matthew 22, the only mention of the groom being that of identifying him as the king's son. No mention at all is made of the bride or of any other aspect of a wedding. The point is that because the feast represents the greatest festivity imaginable, given by the greatest Monarch imaginable, for the most-honored guests imaginable, a royal wedding feast was chosen as the illustration of the ultimate celebration.³

As we discover in the testimony of Jesus in Revelation 19:1–10, we are with Jesus as He celebrates His union with His wife and bride. Why did Jesus never marry while on earth? He was waiting for His perfect bride in heaven. As His perfect bride, on your way to the table at that heavenly banquet, what gift are you going to have with you? What is your offering of love to the One who loves you with an everlasting love?

Marriage is a biblical symbol for the relationship between God and His people. Note these excerpts from Old Testament verses where God is speaking to Israel: "**For your Maker is your husband ...**" (Isaiah 54:5, emphasis added); "... **I am married to you ...**" (Jeremiah 3:14, emphasis added); and "... **I will betroth you to Me ...**" (Hosea 2:19, emphasis added).

Salvation—knowing God and being a child of God—is the highest relationship we can know on this planet. God said, "I want you to have the closest human relationship with Me that you

will ever know on this planet, only more glorious.” But because of Israel’s continued unfaithfulness, God divorced them: “... **I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce ...**” (Jeremiah 3:8, emphasis added).

In the New Testament we have the symbolism of the church as Christ’s bride: “*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son ... [and] ... the wedding hall was filled with guests*” (Matthew 22:2, 10, emphasis added). In Matthew 25:1, Jesus told the parable of the virgins who took their lamps and “... **went out to meet the bridegroom**” (emphasis added). In Mark 2:19, He said, ... “*Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? ...*” (emphasis added). In John 3:29, Jesus said that “*the friend of the bridegroom*” rejoices when hearing “*the bridegroom’s voice ...*” (emphasis added). In 2 Corinthians 11:2 we see His godly jealousy when He says, ... **I have betrothed you to one husband** ... (emphasis added). And in Ephesians 5:23, Paul states that ... **the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church** ... (Ephesians 5:23, emphasis added).

As a godly marriage grows in its love, so a relationship with Jesus grows in its love. As the intimate relationship of a husband and wife is meant to be the closest and deepest sharing known on earth, so the relationship we have with the Lord is to be the deepest, closest, and most intimate—and that begins now, while we are still here on earth. As a loving marriage is meant to bring our truest joys, so is a genuine relationship with Jesus. Marriage demands loyalty and faithfulness, so we must offer absolute loyalty to our Lord Jesus.

THURSDAY: Who Do You Love?

“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, emphasis added).

When I was engaged to my wife, Bonnie, I was not in America most of those months. I spent ninety-six days touring forty-two countries. Everywhere I checked into a hotel, I went to the manager’s desk and gave them my name. They would look me over, and then pull out a letter for me; Bonnie had found me in the most remote parts of the world. I dropped my baggage to the floor, and sat down wherever I was to read her letter. It did not matter to me whether I found my room or not—I read the letter from the one I loved.

Do you know that you have a letter waiting for you every day from your beloved One? Have you dropped your “baggage” lately because you long for the One you love? As a godly marriage brings the most precious joys we can know on this planet, so does a genuine relationship with Jesus. It gets sweeter as the years go by! That is why I love to get to know saints who have been in love with Jesus for a long, long time. They have discovered the great joys of living by Matthew 22:37: *Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

Now we come to the wedding banquet in Revelation 19—the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. But what can we bring to the Lamb as a wedding gift? What gift is worthy of giving to our beloved at our wedding celebration? How can we express our love to the One who loved us so much that He gave His very life for us?

When I am out shopping with Bonnie, we often meet people who are shopping for baby showers, bridal showers, weddings, and so forth. Most people are very particular about what they buy for those they love. And the greater the love, the more particular they are in the choice of their gift. They want it to be special, useful, and needed, and even want to wrap it to show how important it is. Have you ever thought that you are going to get to give something to Jesus? Do you know what He wants? He has completed His wedding registry in His Word.

Have you been listening to what He says He loves and wants so much? There are at least ten elements of daily life that He will reward whenever He sees them in us. Do you know what they are? Are you practicing these reward-getters at every opportunity?

First let me sketch them; and then we can ponder ways to seek for Christ's "Well done!" Most importantly, Jesus loves to see His character reflected in us. How? Here are the first three of the ten elements that represent the gift He desires from each of us.

Element 1—Christlike Disposition in Adversity: *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:11–12). When you are attacked, maligned, or defrauded in any way, remember Stephen. Where did he look for an example? He looked at and followed the example of Jesus!

Element 2—Christlike Secrecy in Spiritual Disciplines: *"But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. And when you pray, ... go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. ... Moreover, when you fast, ... anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"* (Matthew 6:3, 16–18).

Jesus loves for us to do secret and sacrificial things—and to be excited to do them even though no one finds out. Start acting like Jesus did. He went out to commune before daylight sometimes. He stayed up all night in prayer other times. The key to success is to have an unbelievable longing for God!

Element 3—Christlike Attitude toward Possessions: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ...; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19–21). Take some of your stacked possessions and overnight them to the bank of heaven. Jesus says, "Give and you will have forever. Keep and you lose forever!"

FRIDAY: Loving Like Jesus!

"And I have declared to them Your name, ... that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26, emphasis added).

Remember: Jesus loves to see His character reflected in us. Now here are the seven remaining elements of daily life that we can give to our beloved Bridegroom. He desires the following from each of us.

Element 4—Christlike Loving of the Unlovely: *"... Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil" (Luke 6:35).* Do you have a neighbor, coworker, or relative who is unpleasant to you? Show them love and offer kindnesses in the name of Jesus!

Element 5—Christlike Serving of the Unfortunate: *"... When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13–14).* Now look at this verse: *"... Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me"* (Matthew 25:40). Pick new social companions. Befriend the handicapped, the poor, the informally educated, the lonely, the shut-ins, the dying, the prisoners, and any others God puts in your path. That is the body of Christ—non-shockable, accepting, color blind, and incredibly generous. Make plans right now to use your house, your car, and your money to minister His love unto the least of persons, those who cannot do anything in return. And Jesus will reward you in heaven!

Element 6—Christlike Investment in People over Things: *Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor* (1 Corinthians 3:8). Jesus counts souls invited in. He counts lives touched by the gospel, by prayer, by deeds of kindness. What have you done this week that He has counted? Have you prayed for people and given out the gospel? Investments in people last forever; investments in things don't!

Element 7—Christlike Devotion to God's Will: *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ* (Colossians 3:23–24). What are you called to do this week? Go to school? Then act like you are a Rhodes scholar for Jesus. Go to work for your company? Be as productive as if it were your own. Are you home rearing children? Raise them like you were Mary raising Jesus! Elevate whatever you do as if you were doing it for Christ.

Element 8—Christlike Loving Expectancy: *... There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing* (2 Timothy 4:8). Does a newlywed husband need to be told to look forward to seeing his beloved after work? Does a new mom need to be prodded into loving that sweet little bundle of joy? Long for Jesus the way He loves to be loved! He wants us to have the fervor of a newlywed with Him.

Element 9—Christlike Endurance in Trials: *... that the genuineness of your 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 ... (1 Peter 1:7). What are you struggling with? If it is health, you can be rewarded for having a good attitude. If it is adversaries, you can be rewarded for how you treat them. Regardless of the type of trial, you can be rewarded for how you respond to adversities if your responses are Christlike!

Element 10—Christlike Focus on the Word: ... *Love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments ... that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward*" (2 John 5–6, 8). Jesus rewards those who love Him so much that they get His Word into their lives.

Are you overflowing with the world—or the Word? Do you long for His Word more than anything else?

SATURDAY: Clothed with Christ

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts
(Romans 13:14, emphasis added).

In Revelation 19:8 John sees saints clothed in their “righteous acts.” What is this? Isn’t salvation by grace alone? Are these works that He is speaking of? Yes, and yes! God has paid the full and final price in Christ for our salvation. However, we were saved for a purpose. Look at Ephesians 2:8–10: *For by grace you have been saved through faith ...; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

The “righteous acts” in Revelation 19:8 are not to be confused with the righteousness of God imputed to us at conversion (see Romans 3:21–22). We can only *receive* this gracious gift since it can never be earned. All the good deeds of an unsaved person amount to dirty bandages full of filth (see Isaiah 64:6). Apart from Christ we can do nothing, so any righteous deeds we wear are the result of yielding to the Holy Spirit, *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13). Oh, what a blessing to be such channels in His hands!

Revelation 19:8, therefore, is referring to the righteous acts of believers during their earthly lives. When will these acts of righteousness be revealed? At the judgment seat of Christ. Here are the main portions that deal with this event.

It is a REFLECTION of our SANCTIFICATION—in our bodies: *But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all [be presented] before the judgment seat of Christ* (Romans 14:10).

It is a REVELATION of our SELECTION—of our building materials: *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ... If anyone’s work which he has built on it 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 3:11–15).

It is a RECEPTION sponsored BY OUR SAVIOR: *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* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Now then, here are some probing questions that might make you squirm a bit. Has it ever occurred to you, Christian, that you are making your own outfit to wear at this marriage supper of the Lamb—the greatest of all events? What are you putting into this special wedding garment? In the old world a father spent years building the bride's hope chest, and spent years selecting items to lovingly fill it. Are you giving your preparation for heaven that much care? Are you being sanctified by continual washing by the Word? What good are you doing for God that will be spared by the flames of His refining fire? (All self-glorification will burn up and all self-gratification will go—everything done in the energy of the flesh will turn to soot.) What building materials have you provided that will survive?

Finally, will you be wearing the fruits of a good and godly life? The pure white linen of a self-sacrificed life lived in dedication to Christ is a stark contrast to the purple and scarlet of the harlot of Revelation that lived for self alone. Think about it!

Make a choice to live in hope. You cannot get ready for heaven in heaven. Choices you have made and are going to make will determine both your wedding garment at the marriage supper of the Lamb and the type of room in the mansion He's building for His bride. And that determines what rewards you will receive in heaven.

What are these rewards, and how are they described in Scripture? What we know about rewards is given in terms that are more general than specific. The following are those Christ has promised.

The Promise of His Crowns: This seems to be used as a symbol of victory, authority, and responsibility. On display at the Bema seat will be five great crowns for loyal and trustworthy servants of Christ. To steadfast believers tested by prison and persecution even to the point of death, God will give a crown of life (Revelation 2:10). A never-fading, never-tarnishing diadem awaits the self-sacrificing pastor-shepherds of the flock (1 Peter 5:2–4). Everyone who ran life's race with patient endurance and perseverance will receive a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). Evangelists and soul winners can eagerly anticipate receiving the crown of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19–20). Finally, all who overcome will be handed a wonderful victor's crown (1 Corinthians 9:25).

The Promise of His Treasure: This reward stresses their eternal value and security (see Matthew 6:20; 1 Peter 1:4).

The Promise of His Commendations: This is seen in those passages where a reward is administered in the form of acknowledgements such as “*Well done, good and faithful servant ...*” (cf. Matthew 25:21; Luke 19:17; 1 Corinthians 4:5b).

The Promises to His Overcomers: Rather than a general promise to all believers, these rewards could refer to a special blessing of those believers who overcome unique trials and tests. (See Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, and others.)

The Promise of Special Responsibilities and Authority for Him (cf. Matthew 19:28; 24:45–47; 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17–19; 22:29–30; Revelation 2:26).

I encourage you to ask the Lord to work in you whatever is necessary to give Him the greatest gift possible at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Get excited about this time of great praise and rejoicing! Just think: the King of Kings and the Lord of the universe is preparing a wedding feast like none other and, if you are a Christian, you are invited! So make the choice today to live in hope by lovingly preparing yourself for His return!

Week 43—Rest in the Vengeance of Jesus

(Revelation 19:11–21)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you rest in the vengeance of Jesus.



SUNDAY: The Vengeance of Jesus

O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs—... Render punishment to the proud. Lord, how long will the wicked ... triumph? They ... speak insolent things; all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O Lord, and afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, “The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand” (Psalm 94:1–7, emphasis added).

We usually don't think of Jesus as being vengeful. That is why Revelation 19 is so astounding! Since time began, His saints have pondered the wonder of Jesus' waiting to avenge evil upon the earth. This passage is representative of the heart's cry of God's people for thousands of years.

For all of human history since Eden, Satan has seemingly triumphed. Sin and death have run riotously around the globe. Un-avenged evils, from the time of the first murder until this present hour, are still pending. Human history has been written in blood, tears, and death. Yet Jesus still waits—and we, His children, continue to persevere in the hope of Him who endures and anchors our souls. For we know that somewhere beyond the starry sky is a herald angel standing ready, by the decree of the Lord God Almighty, to sound his trumpet, and the kingdoms of this world shall then become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. In that moment, Jesus will return in all His glory to His world!

The climax of all human history unfolds in this week's text (Revelation 19:11–21). The purposes of God long hidden in His eternal counsels are now made clear. When Jesus steps back into history, He will no longer be the suffering servant—He will be Lord of all! Hallelujah!

Now 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; and he cried with a loud voice, 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, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.” And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse 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 those who 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).

What an awesome event! And in that passage we see two remarkably vivid truths: **1. the absolute security of trusting the timing of Jesus** (vv. 11–16), and **2. the absolute futility of resisting the offers of Jesus** (vv. 17–21).

Contemplate the significance of this majestic scene as you reflect upon the content of the prayer below.

My Prayer for You This Week: Glorious Lord Jesus, we, with the apostle John and the saints of all times, say, “Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.” Come to wreak Your vengeance upon this world; come to right all wrongs; come to settle all debts—for vengeance is Yours. You who are a consuming fire in Your holiness, oh Father, have committed all judgment to Your Son. How we await His coming! We know that He will come for us, Your beloved ones in Your church, to take us from this world before the hour of the Great Tribulation comes upon the earth. We know that we shall return, as Your Word says, clothed in white, riding on a white horse as a member of Your army at Your return. As we look into this very beautiful passage, may we see the wonderful truth of Your character revealed. And as we see the folly of the world which thinks it can fight against God, grant discernment that will enable us to better live in the light of Your Word. Bless Your Word to our hearts. Help us to be expectant of Your coming.

or Your calling of us home. May we be found looking and living in a way that pleases You! We thank You in Your precious name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

MONDAY: The Absolute Security of Trusting Jesus' Timing

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen (Jude 24–25, emphasis added).

No book is more tied to the rest of the Bible than Revelation, for Revelation is not only the conclusion but also the summation of the entire Scriptures. Everything that began in Genesis, and has woven its way through all the other books of the Bible, comes to a conclusion here.

Now let us look closely at Revelation 19 as God pulls back the veil and reveals the awesome majesty of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in all His glory! Remember that this is the vivid, eyewitness account of John. He briefly saw this whole revelation from God's perspective—almost at once. Imagine what it would have been like for John to actually *see* the Second Coming of Christ: *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war* (Revelation 19:11 NIV).

The One who ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9–11) and had been seated at the Father's right hand (Hebrews 8:1; 10:12; 1 Peter 3:22) will return to take back the earth from the usurper and establish His kingdom (Revelation 5:1–10). The nature of Christ's Second Coming shows how it differs from the Rapture. At the Rapture, Christ meets His own in the air; in Revelation 19 He comes with them to earth. At the Rapture, there is no judgment; the Second Coming is all about judgment. The day of the Lord (as the Second Coming is called in the Old Testament) is preceded by blackness—a darkened sun, a moon turned blood red, stars seemingly falling from the sky, thick smoke like from a furnace—then lightning and blinding light as Jesus comes. These details are not recorded in Rapture passages (John 14:1–3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

In verse 11 are also two of the wonderful titles of Jesus Christ—Faithful and True. These titles remind us that we can fully trust Him. Not one word He spoke will ever be false. Not one promise He made will ever fail. Christ came for His saints, as He promised (Revelation 4:1), and now He will return with them. During all of human history, He has been watching and waiting. Nothing has missed His eyes. Now He will begin to bring truth to bear upon all lies, falsehoods, and deceptions.

In the broad scope of God's plan for the ages, we know that His timing can be nothing other than perfect. He is never too early and never too late; His timing is always precise. Every genuine prophecy ever made will be fulfilled—exactly as predicted.

On a personal level, the same holds true. We can trust Jesus to hear every prayer that is according to His will, and if He hears us, we have the petition requested (1 John 5:14–15)—at just the right and sometimes absolutely incredible moment.

We can always rest in the absolute security of His perfect timing, whether it is that of fulfilling prophecy or meeting individual needs, for He is the God who does all things well (Mark 7:37)!

In the quietness of your heart, reflect upon God's perfect timing, and then worshipfully sing (or pray) this little chorus to the Lord.

In His Time

*In His time, in His time,
He makes all things beautiful in His time.
Lord, please show me ev'ry day as you're teaching me Your way
That You do just what You say in Your time.*

*In Your time, in Your time,
You make all things beautiful in Your time.
Lord, my life to You I bring; may each song I have to sing
Be to You a lovely thing in Your time.¹*

As you meditate on the wondrous character of Jesus, let your heart feel sweetly secure in the One who is called "*Faithful and True*"—the lover of your soul! No one but Jesus is always faithful and true, and very few are regularly that way. You can expect to be let down at some point by others, but Jesus will never let you down!

TUESDAY: Jesus Will Right All Wrongs

... Do not avenge yourselves, but ... give place to wrath; for ... "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ... The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment (Romans 12:19; 2 Peter 2:9, emphasis added).

Did you know that the earliest prophecy in the Bible was from the first known prophet in the Bible, one who lived *before* the Flood?

There were three categories of people involved in the Flood: **1.** the one who was taken out *before* the Flood came—Enoch; **2.** Noah's family, which was preserved *through* the Flood; and **3.** the earth dwellers who perished *in* the Flood.

The earliest recorded prophecy in the Bible was by Enoch, who was seven generations from Adam. He had a son, Methuselah, who lived the longest of anyone; he was the one whose very name in Hebrew means, "when he dies the judgment will come." And so it seems to have happened at the very same year that Methusaleh died—the Flood began! Methuselah's son was Lamech, and he fathered Noah. In Noah's six hundredth year, the Flood came.

Have you ever thought about how many people perished in the Flood? If the families were the same size as biblical families, and they kept having children as long as was usual back then, there may have been a billion people on this planet when the Flood came. One creationist, Henry Morris, believes that there were four to six billion. If you want to know about God and His justice, how many people survived the Flood? Only nine—one was taken out just before, and eight went through it. If you think that the majority of the world is going to get to heaven, then you are not thinking like God does. God offers salvation to all, but so few come to Him.

Methuselah, according to Jewish tradition, lived until one week before the rain started. Look at what his father prophesied while he lived here: ... *Enoch ... prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands [hundreds of millions] of His saints [His army of the church saints, pre-church saints, pre-Flood saints], to execute judgment on all, to convict ... of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him"* (Jude 14–15). This is a prophecy of Christ's Second Coming. God's analysis of this planet apart from His intervening grace and hearts that are responsive to Him is "ungodly, ungodly, ungodly." There is a moment in the future when God will say, "That is it!" He will then execute judgment on all.

Just as it was at the time of the Flood, in the Tribulation we see the same type categories of people: the saints of the church age who will be pulled out just **before** the Tribulation; the Tribulation witnesses—the 144,000 and the two witnesses—who will be preserved **through** it; and the world that will perish under all the horrors of God's wrath **in** the Tribulation.

To His saints, He offers assurance that He is faithful and true. That is important to grasp, especially when it comes to the matter of executing vengeance. If someone harms you or spitefully uses you, God promises that Jesus will execute vengeance, so He says, "Wait for Me to handle it." The ungodly are punished in this life through never experiencing Christ, but they will also be punished in the life to come. Therefore, we don't need to personally add to their punishment.

Jesus will repay every evil—He asks us to trust Him: "... *Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "the Lord will judge His people*" (Hebrews 10:30). Jesus has promised that He will repay every evil, so trust Him. Getting out of sorts spiritually through anger and bitterness expends vital energies that are better spent elsewhere. So the Lord says, "Trust Me. I will repay every evil if you will just give them to Me instead of trying to handle them yourself."

Jesus will vindicate all who have been oppressed—He asks us to hope in Him: *The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. ... The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble* (Psalm 103:6; Psalm 9:9).

Jesus will reward the righteous—He asks us to work for Him: *So that men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely He is God who judges in the earth"* (Psalm 58:11). God asks us to work for Him, hope in Him, trust in Him, and wait for Him. If someone oppresses you because you are a Christian, the most powerful thing you can do is leave vengeance up to the Lord. That will free you up to serve Him: "*Rejoice ..., for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*" (Matthew 5:12).

Are you assured that Jesus is really the Truth? Are you daily pouring out all your sadness, anxieties, and woes on Him? Only Jesus can give you the rest and peace that all will be well in

Him (Matthew 11:28–30). Let Jesus be your pattern for how to respond to offenses. When He was reviled, He never retaliated. Revelation 19:11–16 bears witness that we can go through our earthly days trusting in the timing of Jesus to right all wrongs.

WEDNESDAY: The Absolute Futility of Resisting Jesus' Power

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God” (Revelation 19:17, emphasis added).

In Revelation 19:17–21, we see the folly of the world as they finally begin to reap the justice they deserve. What does the Lord reveal as the elements of this futile resistance against God? The earth dwellers will find that God's plan and His programs are inescapable. Remember Ahab and the bowshot in 1 Kings 22:34? Ahab was the wicked king of Israel. He thought he was smart, so he disguised himself and went into battle with the righteous king of Judah. The king of Judah wore his kingly robes, but he was God's man. In warfare, the opposing forces always tried to attack the king. If they killed him, his army would scatter. The Syrians started shooting their arrows at the king of Judah, but God protected him. But when a soldier of the Syrian army decided to shoot an arrow at random, God directed that arrow between a joint in Ahab's armor and killed him. God had said that Ahab would face His judgment because of his grievous sins, so Ahab could not escape the plan of God. Though a person may run, he or she can never hide from God!

Now look at these elements that further reveal the absolute futility of trying to resist God's power.

The Inescapable Humiliation of Pride by God: “... [The birds] may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great” (19:18). Do you remember Satan's five “I wills” in Isaiah 14? You can try, but you will never succeed in exalting yourself. That is why the Lord says in James 4:6b: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

The Inescapable Power of God: *And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army* (19:19). All the powerful of the planet will come to fight God. Doesn't that make you wonder: *How can anyone fight God? And what will they fight with?*

The Inescapable Judgment of God: *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 those who worshiped his image* (19:20). The beast will be captured—the one who led the whole world astray. He and the false prophet will then be the first to be cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The Inescapable Execution by God: *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* (19:21). All the Lord will have to do is speak, and there will be a 180-mile-long river of blood draining

from human bodies! Their blood will flow to the horse's bridles! At one point near the end of World War II, so many had been killed at Okinawa (150,000 Japanese troops and 15,000 American troops) that survivors tell of walking for miles through pools of blood as they carried away the wounded.

Why does the Lord give such a horribly graphic view of these, His enemies? To remind us of the absolute futility of resisting the power of Jesus! Are you "spinning your wheels" trying to resist Him? Or are you now basking in His love because you have submitted to Him?

THURSDAY: Jesus Offers Intimacy

"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).

Not many experience intimacy with Jesus because they often don't seek Him deeply. When we read some of the old hymns like the eleventh-century song by Bernard Clairvaux—"Jesus the very thought of Thee, with sweetness fills my breast"—the wording seems foreign because we are not customarily prone to thinking in such a manner. Why is that? The old saints intimately spent hours with the Lord. Martin Luther translated the whole Bible from Hebrew and Greek to German, and yet he prayed three to four hours a day. Most of today's Christians can finish prayer in five minutes or less. Men like Luther weren't "asking" the Lord for things—they were "basking" in the delights of Him! "Basking" is resting and nourishing ourselves in the presence of the Lord, getting to know Him personally. Have you ever thought about what a precious, blessed privilege that is?

Jesus said in John 14:21: *"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."* Think about it! The Lord is waiting to unveil more of Himself to *you*. Do you want to experience the God of the universe intimately? Then spend both quality and quantity time with Him.

Do you know why I love astronomy, oceanography, and science in general? What intrigues me so much about all that is getting to learn more about God in nature, because I want to know as much as possible about my Lord. If you want to know God, will you accept the greatest offer of all? A personal, always-present relationship with the majesty on high? The One who is the very center of all-that-ever-will-be wants to show you more of Himself every day.

Jesus wants us to remember what salvation is: *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"* (John 10:27). That is the Christian life in one short statement: we are His sheep because we can hear His voice—He knows us, and we follow Him. If you struggle with assurance of your salvation, are you hearing the voice of the Lord? Is He revealing Himself to You? Are you following Him?

Jesus offers us the enjoyment of intimacy. Are you enjoying an intimate relationship with Him today? Are you enjoying the personal revelation of Him? Do you enjoy talking to Him? Are you reading His letters to you—the Bible's books? Are they at the top of your pile? When the

mail comes, I usually sort through it very quickly. Half of it normally goes into the trash, and half can be read any time. But there is usually a letter or two that I just can't wait to open because I can tell by the handwriting or some other sign that they are of personal interest to me.

In America, one of the most anticipated events is the mail delivery. But far greater is the fresh letter the Lord Jesus mails to us through His Word every day, and He wants us to put it at the top of our pile. I recently met with someone who told me that they were having a bad week and, in fact, a bad summer. I asked, "What is so bad about it?" They admitted that they had not been reading the Bible much. My diagnosis was that they were spiritually sick. At times when we have called the pediatrician about one of our children, their doctor always asks if there is a loss of appetite or lethargy. When that happens, the child is actually sick. As God's child, if you have lost your appetite for God's Word, and have become spiritually lethargic, you are likewise sick. The cure: Do not expose yourself to things that grieve and quench the Holy Spirit of God. Someone has aptly said this about the Bible: "This Book will keep you from sin—or sin will keep you from this Book."

What do you know of Jesus that only comes by long hours shared with Him? I'm not talking about learning from what some great writer has written, but what you personally know from seeing Jesus reflected in His Word until your heart can't help but rise in intimate worship of God. Now do you see how the old saints could pray for hours? Such prayer is a reflection of a heart panting after Christ: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God* (Psalm 42:1).

FRIDAY: Resting in His Redemption

In Him we have redemption through His blood, ... and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ... [He is] ... the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth ... who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5, emphasis added).

The blood of Christ is the scarlet thread that ties all of the Word into one. It is in His shed blood that we hope. Are you resting in Christ's perfect redemption and in the hope you have? Romans 8:1 says, *There is ... no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus* Our sins are gone, and God will never condemn us for them. We will never have to stand in judgment for our sins because Jesus paid it all.

What are you holding onto to get you to God? Do you trust only in the sacrifice of Jesus for you? Do you trust in all that He did, and His redeeming blood—or is it "Jesus' blood plus my baptism" or "Jesus' blood plus 'I'm a good guy'"? It ought to be as hymn writer Count Nicholaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf wrote in 1739: *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.*

Jesus asks us to trust in His faithfulness: ... *The armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses* (Revelation 19:14). This is wonderful! Not one of the members of His armies is lost, missing, or AWOL. He has (and always will) faithfully cared for them through sickness, health, adversity, prosperity, loneliness, and joy. He is thus

called faithful. The very character of God is that of faithfulness: *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord* (1 Corinthians 1:9; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 4:19).

Jesus reminds us to wait for His judgment: *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* (Revelation 19:15). At last it comes, the wrath of God falls. This judgment of Christ's Second Coming is a "compression into a sudden flash, all the inevitable results of wrong doing."² Just as the crashing down of the Red Sea upon Pharaoh was the demonstration of the danger to any human power that defies the supreme power of God, and the inescapable fiery brimstone God used in the judgment on Sodom was about those who trifle with sexual promiscuity, so the fierce wrath of God here at Christ's return is the clear judgment of God upon sin.

Jesus asks us to submit to His authority: *And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS* (Revelation 19:16). Like Job and Jeremiah, we must trust God even when we can't understand Him: ... "*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,*" says the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23–24).

Are you worshiping the Lord, your faithful God? One of the doctrines that some people hold to is the idea of losing your salvation. It attacks the very nature of God, because you did not get saved on your own, and you can't lose salvation on your own. It is a free, gracious gift from God—and He is faithful to keep all that you have committed to Him.

Are you resting in His faithful provision for your needs right now? Are you confident in any adversity that God is above all, and is working His glory through it? How about your health? Is it in His faithful hands? Your children, marital hopes, childbearing desires, or college dreams—are they all given to the faithful One? God will bring them to fruition according to His perfect plan and timing. Trust in His faithfulness!

So then, what does the Second Coming of Christ teach us? Jesus offers us the assurance that He is faithful and true; Jesus offers us the enjoyment of intimacy with Him; Jesus offers us the rest of His redemption; Jesus asks us to trust in His faithfulness; and Jesus asks us to submit to His authority.

Say "Yes, Lord, yes!" to His will and to His way. Trust and obey Him. And when the Spirit speaks to you, with your whole heart agree with Him.

SATURDAY: Great Is God's Faithfulness

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22–23, emphasis added).

What should be our response to what we've learned through Revelation 19 this week and last? Look at verse 19:10 again: ... *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."* There are two gems in this verse: **1. worship God**, and **2. see Jesus**.

Worship God by giving Jesus your consecration. Focus on the reverent presentation of all you have to God, which is your spiritual worship: ... *Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (Romans 12:1–2).

Worship God by giving Jesus your devotion. Let Jesus reveal Himself to you in every page of His Book. Learn to pause and often pray Psalm 119:18 before you study God's Word: *Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.* Yield to Him as He opens the Word; earnestly seek Him, and prayerfully allow Him to open your eyes. Give Him the devotion of your spirit in worship, and your body as a living sacrifice.

Worship God by yielding to Jesus: ... *Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. ... It came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight* (Luke 24:27, 30–31).

Worship God by earnestly living for Jesus: *Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow* (1 Peter 1:10–11).

Worship God by prayerfulness: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, emphasis added). In these few verses God gives the prerequisites for living the kind of life that truly honors Him: rejoice, pray, and give thanks!

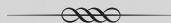
Make a choice to live in hope. To live in enduring hope, reaffirm today that you will not let anything interfere with consecrating your body and your life to Him. Ask the Lord to empower you to not walk in pride, to not walk undisciplined in lust, to not let anything wicked be before your eyes, and to not let your hands be used for things that defile and thus grieve and quench the Holy Spirit. Make this commitment to Jesus: *By Your grace, I will not let myself be any less than a consecrated sacrifice to You.* That is how you can worship the Lord as He deserves.

So then, I exhort you to choose to see Jesus as faithful and true. See Him as the faithful One who always speaks truth. See Him as the One who will never break a promise. See Him as the One you can always trust!

Week 44—Look for Paradise on Earth

(Revelation 20:1–10)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you look for paradise on earth!



SUNDAY: The Real Utopia

“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” says the LORD (Isaiah 65:25, emphasis added).

We now come to the incredible part of the book of Revelation! So much of what we think about this book will now be covered—heaven and the perfections of a restored earth.

I grew up in a church where we often recited the Lord’s Prayer, saying: *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10). Recitation of that prayer is not common today. Yet, from God’s perspective, everything related to the coming of His kingdom is right on schedule, and in this week’s devotionals we will see what is going to happen.

It is time to focus our attentions on the new world God has planned, because this old one is dying. Although this old world is doomed, He has some great plans for the future of this planet. God has planned for a whole new world—far beyond anything we could ever plan or do. The Lord is preparing to restore an Eden-like paradise on earth again! There are dozens of promised changes until the world blossoms like a rose garden—yet with no blight and no bugs! When will all that happen? It will occur in the Millennium.

Revelation 20 is the step between Earth, as we know it, and Heaven for Eternity. It declares that the golden age will arrive. The armies of the nations have been disbanded, and the great military academies have fallen into ruin and decay. The machinery of war has all been smelted down and converted to the implements of peace. Jerusalem has become the world’s capital. The throne of David is there, and the twelve apostles are there judging the

twelve tribes of Israel, for Israel rules the World. The millennial Temple has been built to crown Moriah's brow, and the nations of the Earth come there to worship the living God. Prosperity is evident from pole to pole. Poverty is unknown. Every man has all that his heart can desire. There are no prisons, no hospitals, no mental institutions, no barracks, no saloons, no houses of ill repute, no gambling dens, and no homes for the aged and infirm. Such things belong to a past and lesser age. The bloom of youth is on everyone's cheek, for a man is a stripling at a hundred years of age. Cemeteries are crumbling relics of the past, and tears are rare. The wolf and the lamb, the calf and the lion, the cow and the bear, the child and the scorpion, all are at peace. Jesus has come, and the millennium is here. The golden age, so frequently heralded by the prophets of Israel's past, has dawned at last, and the Earth is filled with the knowledge of God. Jesus is Lord, and He rules the nations with a rod of iron. His reign is righteous, and the nations obey. The principles of the Sermon on the Mount are the laws of the Kingdom, and men obey them because infractions are not allowed. Sin is visited with swift and certain judgment. The era lasts for a thousand years.¹

As you read that description of what it will be like in the Millennium, didn't your heart respond with joy at the very thought of what God has planned?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord, as we think about this twentieth chapter in Your Revelation, we are reminded of what so many in our world are longing for—to preserve the beauty of Your Creation. But it is so sad because they do not know the Creator! They want to preserve the wonder of life that You breathed into this planet, but they have never met the Lord of life. They want to see paradise restored, but they do not understand why paradise was lost in the first place. Help us to better comprehend Your plan for bringing about the temporary abatement of the curse on this earth. And yet, it will only further reveal that human hearts are not influenced by their environment. Oh God, only the blood of Jesus can deal with and cleanse away the deep dark stain of sin that all of us were born with! For even on a perfect earth, the whole planet and the population will once more turn against You in the end. Oh, how we want to be numbered among those who say YES to You, Lord, and be among those who want to do Your will every day. Thank You for this glorious chapter! We pray that we will rejoice in Your Word, and rejoice in the future of this world, by laboring for those things which shall never perish. Thank You for illuminating our eyes as we look into Your Book. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

MONDAY: The Return of Christ—the King of Kings

Now 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 (Revelation 19:11–13, emphasis added).

To best understand chapter 20, we need to first look at Revelation 19:11–20:10 where we see God's mighty plan in three distinct strokes: (1) the **return** of Christ—the King of Kings (19:11–21); (2) the judgment of Satan—his **restraint** (20:1–3); and (3) the Millennium—the **rule** of the Messiah (20:4–10). Those are the three general divisions of this Scripture passage that we will be learning about this week.

The apostle John and others vividly show us Christ's re-entry. Here are the biblical elements that burst forth in this moment as Christ returns.

Christ returns in judgment—seen by everyone on the planet. As heaven opens, Jesus enters the sky, and the sign of the Son of Man appears (Matthew 24:30). He rides on a white horse, accompanied by the armies of heaven. Out of His mouth goes forth a sharp two-edged sword, and He Himself treads the winepress of the wrath of God Almighty (Revelation 19:11–16). Jesus wears blood-dipped garments (Revelation 19:13), and holds a ruling rod of iron (Revelation 19:15, which is a response to Psalm 2:9).

Jesus pours out His wrath on sin as One who treads the winepress (Revelation 19:15, which refers back to Isaiah 63:1–6). The “robe dipped in blood” makes us think primarily of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross. Isaiah says that He is the One who is trampling the earth in His wrath, and the grapes squirt up on His white robe. The blood of Him trampling out the winepress of His wrath is why His garment is spoken of as “dipped in blood.”

Jesus gathers all the rebels as One who threshes the harvest floor (Micah 4:12–13; Matthew 3:12). He reaps the earth with the sickle of Divine Judgment (Joel 3:13; Revelation 14:17–18).

Christ returns in judgment—feared by all rebels. No one can escape, even though some will have dislocated the bats out of caves during the Tribulation in an effort to hide from God (Isaiah 2:19). Jesus is recognized by the earth dwellers when the despised Jesus of Nazareth appears on earth again, and all the families of the earth will wail (Matthew 24:30)! The day of the Lord that was spoken of by Joel and Amos will have arrived (Joel 1:15, 3:14; Amos 5:20). Jesus is visibly angry: this is the “*day of His fierce anger*” (Isaiah 13:13) and the “*great and terrible*” day (Malachi 4:5 NASB).

Jesus' return is like the worst storm imaginable. This will be a *day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness* (Joel 2:2; Zechariah 14:6). Jesus terrifies the earth: in horror, the earth dwellers will creep into the clefts and ravines (Revelation 6:15) or hide in the caverns of the rocks and the holes of the earth (Isaiah 2:19). They will cry out to the mountains, “*Fall on us! And to the hills, cover us!*” (Luke 23:30; Revelation 6:16; 9:6). But it will be impossible to escape from God's judgment.

Christ returns in judgment—poured on all rebels. His arrival will be like the swift and blinding flash of lightning (Matthew 24:27). All the chariots of His army will sweep the earth as a tempest (Isaiah 66:15). His eyes are as flames of fire (Revelation 19:12). His voice is as the voice of a lion (Joel 3:16; Isaiah 30:30), and the slain of the Lord will be many (Isaiah 66:15–16; Psalm 110:6).

Jesus' vengeance is as a flaming fire (2 Thessalonians 1:8; Isaiah 66:15–16). His day is as a fiery oven (Malachi 4:1; Matthew 13:41–42) and is an inescapable snare (Luke 21:35). His fear is a sudden destruction that will "seize all" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Jesus' wrath is as inescapable as the Flood in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:38–39), and as the fiery judgment that overtook Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:28–32).

Christ returns in judgment—glorified by all rebels. The Lord will first appear on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4), where He formerly ascended (Acts 1:9, 12). Every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:30). All the people will be so terrified and transfixed that they can't hide. Every contradiction will be silenced (Matthew 22:12; Job 9:3)—everything they have ever spoken against God. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the honor of God the Father (Philippians 2:11). This will include everyone who has ever lived! The KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS has returned! Hallelujah!

TUESDAY: The Judgment of Satan—His Restraint

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 (Revelation 20:1–3, emphasis added).

In this passage, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords has now returned. He has squelched the rebellion, terrified the inhabitants of the earth, and He has slain the rebels.

What the apostle John started seeing in chapter 19 takes us from the earth to the end of the earth, into the Millennium to the end of the Millennium, and then into the eternal state. These events happened in chronological sequence to show that the Millennium is actually a literal 1,000 years. Up until St. Augustine (A.D. 354–430), everyone believed that the return of Christ was to be followed by a literal 1,000-year reign. But when he wrote *The City of God*, confusion entered in. St. Augustine viewed the city of God as the church on earth; thus the 1,000 years was merely figurative. That would mean that we would be fulfilling God's kingdom here on earth, and thus people ought to invest all they have on earth—and not in heaven. But St. Augustine's interpretation was mistaken, and it has confused people ever since.

Some people have felt that the twentieth chapter of Revelation isn't actually going to happen—even though Scripture specifically says "a thousand years" five times in verses 2 through 7 of chapter 20. According to Scripture, the Millennium is a literal event, and this is a chronological sequence. The only way that God can fulfill all the millennial passages is through this literal event. Not only is there a sequence that shows the literal event, verse 3 states that Satan is placed in the bottomless pit. If you recall, this bottomless pit (or abyss) was last opened by Satan in

chapter 9. He had a key, so he let out all those monsters! But now the angel has the key, opens the pit, and throws Satan in.

In Revelation 20:2, notice the names that are given in this biography of the devil: *the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan*. That is basically the history of Satan's career. He is the dragon that took the heavenly hosts with him; he is the serpent that tempted Eve who then led Adam into the rebellion; he is the devil who has been seeking to tempt and pervert humanity; he is Satan, the adversary, who has always stood against God's plan and God's people.

Satan gets true justice when he is bound and placed in the bottomless pit. John says that the angel ... *cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him* There is a poetic justice in God's dealings with Satan. Centuries ago the evil one saw to it that the mortal remains of God's beloved Son were shut up in a tomb and sealed. So it is interesting that God has Satan put in a tomb and sealed just like the Son of God. But that is where the similarity ends: the Son of God rose triumphantly, and Satan is held captive.

Look at what John Phillips has to say on this subject: "Throughout the tribulation era, Satan has opened the abyss to plague mankind, once with horrible demons and once with the recalled soul of the beast. Now he himself is consigned to that dark hole and sealed in by an act of God, and there he rages in the most secure prison cell in the universe. It is the condemned cell, and he knows it.

"He has his thoughts to keep him company, and terrible thoughts they are—Thoughts of the day of his creation when he sprang mature, magnificent, and mighty from the hand of God; ... as the anointed cherub ... once he led the worship of the angel hosts; Thoughts of God's throne and his attempts to seize it for himself; Thoughts of his fall, of his entrance into Eden, of his short-lived triumph over the first human pair; Thoughts of the sentence passed upon him by God and of his futile efforts to prevent the coming of the promised Seed; Thoughts of Calvary and of his utter defeat; Thoughts of the fleeting moments when he brought the World to the foot of his incarnation, the beast, and had seemingly triumphed at last; Thoughts of the lake of fire just ahead. He is given a thousand years in confinement to think of his own eternal destruction."²

Tomorrow we will see the millennial blessings ahead for those who love the Lord!

WEDNESDAY: The Millennium—The Rule of the Messiah

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 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 (Revelation 20:4–6, emphasis added).

But what is the final state of earthly history? It is the rule of Christ. Let us now note these views on the Millennium.

The Millennium is God establishing what He promised in Daniel 2:35: "*Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*" This is the millennial kingdom. The insignificant stone shatters Nebuchadnezzar's imposing colossus (comp. Matt. 21:44), but afterwards it increases to a great mountain and fills the whole earth (Dan. 2:35, 44, 45). The stone cut without hands is divine, it is Jesus Christ coming and crushing this image that is a representation of the kingdoms of the earth—Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome.

"The image—all earthly government—is crushed by the Rock—Dan. 2:44, 'And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.'⁴⁵ Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.' What we are seeing here is the Millennium—Rev. 20—the establishment of this kingdom that God cut without hands out of the rock and crushes all the kingdoms of the earth and this rock grows into a Kingdom that will never cease."³

The Millennium is God confirming the kingdom of the Son of Man, which prepares an end for the bloodthirsty beasts of Daniel's world empire. For the first time, it exalts to the throne of international history true humanity in the sense of Holy Scripture—humanity in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27; Daniel 7:13, comp. 2–7; Matthew 26:64).

The Millennium is God revealing the kingdom of heaven, which comes down from heaven, and therefore brings into this earthly world heavenly nature and heavenly happiness (comp. Daniel 4:23). Don't confuse the Millennium with heaven. Sin is only held in abeyance; it is not removed. That is why people can still sin during the 1,000 years. Much of Isaiah is about the Millennium, and he says that if someone dies at the age of 100 they are considered a mere child. People live the whole 1,000 years—unless they are in rebellion, and then God cuts them off. We will be here on earth reigning and ruling with Christ. And Jesus will be here literally. There will be a massive temple in Jerusalem, which is so big that all the inhabitants of the earth will come through regularly to observe what is going on in there. Literal sacrifices will even be offered. Just as the Lord's Supper looks forward until Jesus comes, the sacrifices will be reinstated to atone for people, but they will look back on the sacrifice of Christ. Like the Old Testament covenant that pictured Christ for the Jews, so in the Millennium they are going to have the same thing pointing back to His sacrifice on the cross. No one was saved in the Old Testament by killing a lamb, and no one will be saved in the Millennium by killing a lamb. No one is saved by taking part in the Lord's Table either. They are all pictures to illustrate a biblical truth. It will be a very fascinating time when God reveals His kingdom and brings such heavenly joys!

The Millennium is God fulfilling the kingdom of God, which was planned from the very beginning—“*Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’*” (Matthew 25:34). This kingdom was striven for through the ages (Matthew 6:10); founded by Christ (John 18:36–37); preached by His followers (Acts 20:25; 28:31); expected by mankind (Romans 8:19); and set up on the old earth (Revelation 11:15; 19:6), after the final catastrophe of the hitherto existing world (Revelation 20:7–15), to run on into the new eternal creation (Revelation 21 and 22).

What will planet Earth be like during the Millennium? The sky will change (Isaiah 4:5–6; 30:26; 60:19). The earth will apparently be surrounded by a new kind of atmospheric light that will accelerate productivity. It will be like living in a greenhouse again. Harmful solar radiation will be gone, and there will be a global tropical climate.

The world of nature will change during the kingdom—the curse will be removed! The animal kingdom will find compatibility with human life. There will be no more predators or scavengers. (Isaiah 11:6–9; 65:25). Agricultural production will be abundant (Isaiah 30:23–25; 35:1–2; 55:12–13).

The threat of disease will change as there will be no sickness or deformity of any kind (Isaiah 29:17–19; 33:24; 35:3–6). There will be exceptionally long life (Isaiah 65:19–23).

The political climate will change as Jesus brings real peace and justice to the earth during His reign (Isaiah 2:4; 42:6–7; 54:14–15). Christ will be the perfect ruler: no lawsuits, no crime, no political machinations, and no unfulfilled promises.

The spiritual climate will change as earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord and His Word (Isaiah 2:3; 11:9; 12:4–5; 52:6–10). Everyone will go to Jerusalem to see the King on His throne, the temple, and all that points to God. In fact, if you don’t come to the temple, it won’t rain on your part of the world. God will rule and show His power!

THURSDAY: The Release and Doom of Satan

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10, emphasis added).

Now that we have seen that the King of Kings will return, Satan will be restrained, and Christ will rule in the Millennium, what is next? Look at Revelation 20:7: *Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison*

When will that happen? Satan’s release will occur immediately at the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ. It is almost like a meter: God puts in a thousand-year quarter, turns the knob, and the timer starts. Satan will have been raging, and thinking about everything, but then he gets one more chance to afflict the earth: ... [Satan] *will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea* (Revelation 20:8).

It is mind-boggling to think that people could sink so low as to listen to Satan after 1,000 years of seeing Jesus and what the world was like under His rule! There was perfect justice, perfect peace, perfect health, and perfect agricultural production. But then the old dragon gets out—and he has a huge following once again. *Gog and Magog* is just another way of saying “all the peoples of the world.” There will still be nations, but this is not identifying Russia as the evil ones. *Gog and Magog* is a euphemism for the people who are in rebellion against God.

So Satan gathers them to do battle. He gets the whole planet to rebel and try to attack the beloved city. Look at verse 9: *They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.* God didn’t say a word. Remember the rebellion of Korah in the Old Testament where Nadab and Abihu disobeyed and fire came? Satan gets the same fate in Revelation 20:10: *The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

Let’s go back to Revelation 19:20, because I want you to be aware of a terrible theological error called “annihilationism.” That view says that God is too good to keep anyone burning in hell, so He simply evaporates them and they cease to exist. Here is what really happens to people who are in the lake of fire: *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 those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.*

Now look at the end of 20:10: ... *They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.* Those two characters were thrown alive into the lake of fire—the first ones in there. What are they like after 1,000 years in the fire? Are they consumed? No, they are still alive and conscious and experiencing the horrors of hell.

Why is Satan being released again? He will be released to demonstrate once and for all that a perfect environment does not change man’s sin problem. This will illustrate the incurable wickedness of Satan who returns immediately to his deceptive ministry. It will justify eternal punishment and show that man, even though exposed to righteousness for an extended period of time, when given the opportunity to accept Christ, will still reject Him.

Where will Satan go after his release is over? He will be cast into the lake of fire where he will be tormented day and night forever.

Mankind was tried—and found guilty on every count. In this brief moment, as all of history flashes before us, man is found to be absolutely guilty! In the Millennium his sin is absolutely inexcusable. Mankind was tested in the garden of delight, but he broke the only prohibition laid upon him, and sinned. He was tested under conscience (pre-Flood); corruption and violence filled the earth, which had to be cleared by the deluge. He was tested again under the restraining influence of divinely appointed (post-Flood) government, but man went into idolatry, thus turning his back upon his Creator.

Mankind was tested under Israel’s law, but he cast off all restraint and crucified the Lord of glory. Mankind was also tested under grace (the church). In this present dispensation of the

Holy Spirit, he has shown himself utterly unable to appreciate such mercy, has rejected the gospel, and gone ever deeper into sin.

Mankind was tested under the personal reign (the Millennium) of the Lord Jesus Christ for a thousand years. While He is here on earth in all His glory and power, personally meting out judgment and revealing Himself, He will stand in the millennial temple and say, "This points to Me." Yet the whole world refuses to hear Him. So Satan will lead the whole world astray moments after his release. In conclusion, mankind will have been tested and found guilty at every level!

God cares. (See Hebrews 4:14–16.) He is genuinely interested in this world, its needs, and its inhabitants—now as well as in the future. God cares so much that He has warned us that all of this is coming. That is why President Johnson's Great Society programs in the 1960s did not work. If you clean up every city and slum, and remove every bad influence, the problem still exists because it is inside of us. Therefore, God says, "You don't need a new city, house, job, or clothes. You need a new heart." Even the perfect world with no sin and rebellion, and a perfect paradise, is polluted by the sin of man's heart, the sin nature that man is born with. By nature, by choice, by God's divine decree we are cursed, but Jesus Christ can remove it.

God controls. (See Daniel 4:35.) He has not lost control. Satan is on a time schedule, and he can only go so far before God will shut him up in the pit. God is sovereign, and He is working all things together for good now as well as in the future. All the way through the millennial time, He sovereignly offers the temple to the people. You can read about it in Ezekiel chapters 40–48. It describes the temple in detail (how big it is, the rooms, the courtyard). There is a life-giving river flowing out from under the altar that goes to the Dead Sea, and makes that area one of the most fertile areas in the world. Everybody can see it. God is in total control, yet people still reject Him.

God communicates His way to us. The God we serve is not a God of silence. He does not want to leave us in the dark. He lets us know what is going to happen—right down to some very minute details. We can have great confidence from knowing what is going to happen. Are you obeying Him? As Christians, we shouldn't spend our time trying to save the earth; we need to focus on saving souls. Give people the good news that God offers a new heart and a new spirit—that He will take away their stony heart and replace it with a soft heart.

It is interesting to live in a world where the enemies of God are getting the most powerful technology—which will lead so fast to Israel being surrounded, and without hope, until they look up. But until that moment happens, we are supposed to be opening people's eyes to God's Word. Are you faithfully sharing the Word with those who so desperately need to hear it?

FRIDAY: A Summary of Old Testament Millennial Promises

*"Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this **the words of the prophets agree**, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind*

may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things. Known to God from eternity are all His works" (Acts 15:14–18, emphasis added).

How does what we've been learning so far in Revelation 20 compare with Old Testament millennial promises? Various prophetic commentators have traced it like this.

Isaiah describes the kingdom in such glowing terms. Throughout his entire prophecy Isaiah sees, through faith's telescope, the glorious time when Israel and Judah shall be one people in their own land, restored in soul to God, dwelling in peace every man under his own vine and fig tree, and the glory of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea. He tells how even nature itself shall respond to Messiah's rule, and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. The brute Creation too shall be delivered from the curse. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. The lamb shall lie down with the wolf, and "*a little child shall lead them.*" All nations will then ask the way to Zion; and Jerusalem shall become the metropolis, not only of a rejuvenated Palestine, but also of the whole earth.

Jeremiah takes up the same happy strain, and foresees the God of Israel sending "*fishers*" out into the sea of the nations, fishing out His people no matter where they may be hidden, and bringing them back to the land of their fathers. He sees the city built again and inhabited by a peaceful, happy nation under the reign of the "*righteous Branch*" whom God has promised to raise up unto David, and "*in his days, Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name by which He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*" (23:6). Then they shall no longer need to *teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.* (Hebrews 8:11 KJV).

Ezekiel adds to the wondrous story, and tells of the Spirit being poured out from on high, and describes the services of the regenerated Israel, a priestly nation, through whom the law of God goes forth to all the lands of the nations. He depicts the millennial temple, and even tells us how the land is to be divided among the tribes, and does not close his remarkable book until he can say, "... *the name of the city from that day shall be: [Jehovah—Shammah]—THE LORD IS THERE*" (48:35).

Daniel's companion-apocalypse visions conclude with the bringing in of the fifth universal kingdom, and this he tells us is the Kingdom of the Son of Man, which is to displace every other, and is to stand forever. This is the stone cut out without hands that falls upon the feet of the Gentile image and grinds it to powder, and then becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. This is the Kingdom conferred upon the Son of Man by the Ancient of Days, when the bodies of the beasts (symbolizing the four great empires that have borne rule over all the civilized earth) shall be cast into the burning flame.

Hosea shows that Messiah would come in lowly grace, be rejected by Israel, and return to His place until they acknowledge their sin and seek His face. Then He would come back to restore

their souls and to ransom them from the power of the grave, bringing in everlasting righteousness, and making them a blessing to all nations.

Joel sees the Great Tribulation in all its intensity, but beholds the glory that shall follow, and predicts the outpouring of the Spirit, not on Israel only, but on all flesh.

Amos bears witness to the gathering again of the outcasts of Israel, and their resettlement in their land under Jehovah's perfect rule.

Obadiah wrote the shortest of all the prophecies, and he speaks chiefly of judgment upon Edom, declaring triumphantly, *The kingdom shall be the Lord's* (v. 21).

Jonah alone, of all the prophetic brotherhood, seems to have no reference to that day of Jehovah's power; yet, we may learn through him how wonderfully God will own the testimony of Hebrew missionaries in the beginning of the kingdom age, as they go forth to spread the gospel among those who have not heard His fame, nor seen His glory.

Micah joins with Isaiah in describing the time when ... *the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains ... and peoples shall flow to it For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks ... [and] neither shall they learn war anymore* (4:1–3).

Nahum predicts the judgments that shall befall the enemies of Jehovah in the day of His preparation; while **Habakkuk**, standing on his watch-tower, sees the coming King bringing in the glory.

Zephaniah and Haggai point onward to the restoration of Israel, and through them the blessing of the whole world, when the Lord their God is enthroned in the midst of them, and they serve Him with one consent.

Zechariah, the prophet of glory, gives minute details that no others have touched upon, and even tells of the provision to be made for children's playgrounds in the restored capital of Palestine, for he says, "*The broad places of the city shall be full of boys and girls, playing in the broad places thereof*" (literal rendering). He sees every spot in Jerusalem holy to the Lord, and all nations wending their way thitherward from year to year to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Malachi completes the series and announces the soon-coming of the King, heralded by the prophet Elijah, to tread down the wicked and sit as a refiner of silver to purify the sons of Levi, and to make His name great from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.

Thus *to Him give all the prophets witness* (Acts 10:43), not only that through His name remission of sins is now to be proclaimed among all nations, but that He is to reign in righteousness over all the world, when He comes the second time to claim the inheritance which is His by divine fiat, as Son and Heir of all things. Then all the earth will rejoice for the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the tongue of the dumb shall sing, the lame man shall leap as the deer, sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and the Lord alone shall be exalted for a thousand glorious years!

SATURDAY: Truths That Bring Hope

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14, emphasis added).

The following are truths that you are not likely to ever hear, except from the Book that only tells the Truth—the Word of God!

Satan is stoppable and vulnerable (Revelation 20:1–3). We can overcome him by: the way of goodness—a fruit of the Spirit (Romans 12:21); the Word of God (1 John 2:14); the walk of faith (1 John 5:4); and the blood of Jesus and the word of our testimony (Revelation 12:11).

Suffering is valuable (Revelation 20:4–6). Suffering for Jesus partners us with the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:17–24), and suffering for Jesus is God's plan: *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake ...* (Philippians 1:29). Suffering for Jesus allows us an intimate sharing with Christ's sufferings that we ... *may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death* (Philippians 3:10).

Suffering for Jesus strengthens our walk in the Lord: ... *We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure ...* (2 Thessalonians 1:4). Suffering for Jesus prepares us for future service for the Lord in heaven: *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us* (2 Timothy 2:12). We can share in His sufferings (1 Peter 4:13), and be strengthened by persevering through the trials (1 Peter 5:10).

People are so deceivable and gullible (Revelation 20:7–9). Christ has therefore warned us to beware of deceptions, especially in the last days: "... Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4–5; see also Matthew 24:11, 24).

May Christ's kingdom come! Now let us turn our focus to Christ's coming and the Lord's Prayer. Although I touched on this verse a little earlier, I'd like to develop it a bit more: "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). These are familiar words in our Lord's giving of a model prayer to His disciples. What kingdom is He talking about? We know that it is not the universal, providential, sovereign rule of God because that is occurring right now.

David had this to say about God's kingdom in this present age: *The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all* (Psalm 103:19). Paul affirmed God's rule in Ephesians 1:11: *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*

We do not pray for that which already exists. No, the key is in the clause that qualifies all three petitions: "*On earth as it is in heaven*." So then, what is the petition Christ desired to ever be on the hearts and lips of His own people—we Christians? He wants us to earnestly pray: *Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth just like it is in heaven*. Therefore, Christ must come to put this rebellion down—and for *that*, we are to pray!

Make a choice to live in hope. Since God will keep His Word about the kingdom, we can count on Him to also keep His Word about today. Perhaps your life presently seems miserable and difficult, and you long to escape whatever is weighing you down. Sometimes people think that if they could only change their circumstances they would be happier or better off in some other way. But did you know that external change is powerless?

A change in outer circumstances can effect no real inner transformation. Christ's visible presence on earth during the Millennium proves that even an outward paradise does not produce godliness within. No, the solution to living in enduring hope is to choose to let Him reign within your life.

God, therefore, wants you to believe: "My presence is always with you, and I will give you rest!" He wants you to cling to Him in hope because He has promised to bring you victoriously through whatever trial(s) you may be experiencing. For God works in all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28)!

The following song is one of my favorites. It makes a wonderful prayer for those seeking to walk triumphantly in Christ. Read the words carefully, and then worshipfully talk to the Lord about areas where you sense He wants you to yield to His direction in your life.

Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord

*Teach me Thy Way, O Lord, teach me Thy way!
Thy guiding grace afford—teach me Thy way!
Help me to walk aright, more by faith, less by sight;
lead me with heav'nly light—teach me Thy Way!*

*When I am sad at heart, teach me Thy Way!
When earthly joys depart, teach me Thy Way!
In hours of loneliness, in times of dire distress,
in failure or success, teach me Thy Way.*

*When doubts and fears arise, teach me Thy Way!
When storms o'er spread the skies, teach me Thy Way!
Shine thru the cloud and rain, thru sorrow, toil and pain;
make Thou my pathway plain—teach me Thy Way!*

*Long as my life shall last, teach me Thy Way!
Where'er my lot be cast, teach me Thy Way!
Until the race is run, until the journey's done,
until the crown is won, teach me Thy Way!*

—Mansell Ramsey, 1849–1923⁴

Week 45—Fear the Holiness of Jesus

(Revelation 20:11–15)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you learn to fear the holiness of Jesus!



SUNDAY: The Holiness of Jesus

“Then He will also 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).

Perhaps no scene in the entire Bible grips our minds and stirs our souls as much as the last verses of Revelation 20. Imagine the scene: in one moment all the angels and all the humans who have ever lived on this planet—perhaps as many as forty-five billion souls will be assembled.¹ In utter silence the scene opens. In the glow of God’s glory surrounding His throne stand the redeemed of all the ages. Behind them, in countless ranks, are all the angelic hosts. The four angelic creatures hover about God’s presence while our representatives, the twenty-four elders, stand, and then kneel before the throne.

All the dead, small and great, are in this assembly. Every single person who has ever lived is there: not one soul will escape this summons to the court of God Almighty—His last and greatest and final roll call.

All the “Ivan the Butchers” of this world are present. Those evil emissaries of Satan that gassed women and children hide no more in disguise to escape penalty; they each stand exposed. All the “Genghis Khans” of this world who flayed their enemies alive now have no armies to protect them; they, too, stand alone before the judge.

The Scythians, the murderous horsemen who killed their foes and used their skulls as cups to drink blood, stand silent. The ashes of countless cremated warlords and ruthless business executives cast to the winds and seas, hopeful of escaping God, are now reassembled into bodies. Souls imprisoned in Hades now regain habitation in the bodies in which they sinned and turned from God.

All God-haters, from Voltaire to Hitler, now face the One they despised. The God-resisters who denied God and said no to Him are now assembled, from Pharaoh to the priests of Molech, and they, too, are quaking in dread. They are all present—no one can escape this, their final hour. Before this silent multitude, speechless in the sight of the God they never wanted to know, nor ever wanted to meet, is the eerie flicker of the cauldron of God's holy wrath, the lake of fire.

It is a lake; it is on fire. It is already filled with the devil, his two apostles (the beast and the false prophet), and all the malignant hordes of evil angels. They have already sunk into utter blackness to begin their eternal plunge to the never-ending depths of the blackened pit of darkness. Eternally tormented with the very desire that gripped them—to be away from the Light, the Truth, and the Life—they plunge downward.

As for the billions who stand frozen with the dreadful fear of inescapable doom, the last word of the final judgment begins. This section of Revelation divides into five sobering truths, which I will state now, and we will examine later in the week: (1) The judge is great (v. 11); (2) The judgment is inescapable (v. 12); (3) The standard is exact (v. 13); (4) The sentence is final (v. 14); and (5) Blessed is the Book of Life (v. 15).

Before you end up in the congregation of the doomed at that great white throne, bow to the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you know Him, as His child by grace, bow your heart before Him in worship. Cry out to Him for insights that will impact your life from His Word!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, we know that You are not desiring that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the Truth, to repentance, and to life eternal. You have told us that those who go to hell have fitted themselves for destruction by their refusal, either actively or passively, to say yes to Jesus. We pray that the horror of eternity apart from Your grace, and facing Your wrath, will motivate us to be like the apostle Paul who confessed as his testimony: "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." May we go out to a dying world and point them to You as their only hope for the resurrection and the life. May we soberly, knowing Your terror, persuade lost souls to receive the free gift of eternal life, to repent, and to follow and obey You. Open our hearts to this challenging portion of Your Word so that Christ will be exalted in our lives! We ask all these things in the precious name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.*

MONDAY: Jesus Spoke of Hell More Than Heaven

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28, emphasis added).

We are examining the most horrifying doctrine in God's Word for humans to talk or think about. The fact is that God Himself talks more about hell than He does about heaven. Therefore,

I want to remind you of the reality of an eternal hell, which Jesus said has been prepared for those who do not receive Him.

In Christian circles we speak more of *heaven* than hell. Yet Jesus warned of hell from the very start to the end of His ministry. For example, in the gospel of Matthew, from chapter 3 through chapter 26, you will find this common theme: eternal judgment. Jesus preached continually—in public, in private, with saints, and with sinners—about the horrors awaiting the unsaved lost ones. Jesus spoke much of it; we speak little of it.

Over twenty years ago, I began an intense study of every verse in the Bible. As I read through the Scriptures, I looked for verses on the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the lost. Later this week we will examine some key passages. But for now, I want to give you a summary:² “That hideous doctrine of hell is fading. How often have you thought of it in the past month, for instance? Does it make a difference in your concern for others, in your witness? Is it a constant and proper burden? Our Lord’s words on the subject are unnerving. In Luke 16, He tells us of a rich man who died and went to Hades (the abode of the unsaved dead between death and final judgment).”

Hades is the place where all who reject Jesus Christ, from the time of Adam and Eve through the time of the end of this planet, go. All of those who die without Christ go to the same place—Hades. From that story and a few other revelatory facts, we can infer several characteristics of hell.

Hell is a place of great physical pain. The rich man in Luke 16 is a living immortal soul in the vestibule of the lake of fire. This is not hell proper. The Bible describes hell in the last book of the Bible, and it is called Gehenna. Jesus talked about that, too, but Hades is “the waiting room” before the final judgment. In other words, Hades is the abode of the dead, and the rich man was there.

“The rich man’s initial remark concludes with his most pressing concern: ‘*I am in agony in this flame*’ (Luke 16:24 RSV). We do not make enough of this. We all have experienced pain to some degree. We know it can make a mockery of all life’s goals and beauties. Yet we do not seem to know pain as a hint of hell, a searing foretaste of what will befall those who do not know Christ, a grim reminder of what we will be spared from.”

Do you realize why Jesus spoke about hell so often? He wants us to be like Paul, *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ...* (2 Corinthians 5:11a). “God does not leave us with simply the mute fact of hell’s physical pain. He tells us how real people will respond to that pain. Our Lord is not being macabre; He is simply telling us the truth.”

Hell is a place of “weeping” and “wailing.” “There will also be ‘weeping’ (Luke 13:28). Weeping is not something we get a grip on; it is something that grips us. Recall how you were affected when you last heard someone weep. Remember how you were moved with compassion to want to protect and restore that person? The Lord wants us to know and consider what an upsetting experience it is for the person in hell.

“Another response will be ‘wailing’ (Matthew 13:42). While weeping attracts our sympathy, wailing frightens and offends us. It is the pitiable bawl of a soul seeking escape, hurt beyond repair, eternally damaged. A wail is sound gone grotesque because of conclusions we can’t live with.”

Hell is a place of “gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:28). “Why? Perhaps because of anger or frustration. It may be a defense against crying out or an intense pause when one is too weary to cry any longer.”

More than heaven, Christ spoke of hell. More than love, Christ spoke of eternal destruction. More than the church to come, Christ Jesus warned of God’s wrath and judgment and hell.

Every year, about fifty-six million people enter eternity—the vast majority of them without Christ. I believe that it is imperative for us to pause and reflect on the destination of all those travelers who are leaving the earth to experience eternal suffering. Why? Because JESUS DID. And what is important to Jesus should be important to us!

TUESDAY: The Horrors of Eternal Darkness

... are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7b, emphasis added).

What I am about to share in today’s devotional is a continued summary of what an insightful person once wrote of all the verses on the doctrine of hell.³ If you synthesized them together, and put them in a flowing passage, this is how it would read.

“Hell has two ... aspects, rarely considered, which are both curious and frightening. On earth we take for granted two physical properties that help keep us physically, mentally, and emotionally stable. The first is light; the second is solid, fixed surfaces. Oddly, these two dependables will not accommodate those in hell.”

Hell is a place of darkness (Matthew 8:12). Imagine the person who has just entered hell—a neighbor, relative, coworker, or friend. After a roar of physical pain blasts him, he spends his first moments wailing and gnashing his teeth. But after a season, he grows accustomed to the pain, not that it’s become tolerable, but that his capacity for it has enlarged to comprehend it, yet not be consumed by it. Though he hurts, he is now able to think, and he instinctively looks about him. But as he looks, he sees only blackness.

In his past life he learned that if he looked long enough, a glow of light somewhere would yield definition to his surroundings. So he blinks and strains to focus his eyes, but his efforts yield only blackness. He turns and strains his eyes in another direction. He waits. He sees nothing but unyielding black ink. It clings to him, smothering and oppressing him.

Realizing that the darkness is not going to give way, he nervously begins to feel for something solid to get his bearings. He reaches for walls or rocks or trees or chairs; he stretches his legs to feel the ground and touches nothing.

Hell is a “bottomless pit” (Revelation 20:1–2 KJV). The new occupant is slow to learn. In growing panic, he kicks his feet and waves his arms. He stretches and he lunges. But he finds nothing. After more feverish tries, he pauses from exhaustion, suspended in black. Suddenly, with a scream he kicks, twists, and lunges until he is again too dizzy to move, too nauseous to think, and too exhausted to even continue.

He tumbles onward, alone with his pain. Unable to touch a solid object or see a solitary thing, he begins to weep. His sobs choke through the darkness. Those sobs become weak, then lost in hell's roar.

As time passes, he begins to do what the rich man did—he again starts to think. His first thoughts are of hope. You see, he still thinks as he did on earth, where he kept himself alive with hope. When things got bad, he always found a way out. If he felt pain, he took medicine. If hungry, he ate food. If he lost love, there was more love to be found.

So he casts about in his mind for a plan to apply to the hope building in his chest. Of course, he thinks, Jesus, the God of love, can get me out of this. He cries out with a surge, "Jesus, Jesus! You were right! Help me! Get me out of this!" He waits, breathing hard with desperation. The sound of his voice slips into the darkness and is lost. He tries again, "I believe, Jesus! I believe now! Save me from this!" Again the darkness smothers his words.

Our sinner is not unique. Everyone in hell believes. When he wearies of appeals, he does next what anyone would do—assesses his situation and attempts to adapt. But then it hits him—this is forever.

Jesus had made it very clear. He had used the same words for "*forever*" to describe both heaven and hell. Forever, he thinks, and his mind labors through the blackness until he aches. "Forever!" he whispers in wonder. The idea deepens, widens, and towers over him. The awful truth spreads before him like endless, overlapping slats. When I put in ten thousand centuries of time here, I will not have accomplished one thing. I will not have one second less to spend here.

As the rich man pleaded for a drop of water, so, too, our new occupant entertains a similar ambition. In life he learned that even bad things could be tolerated if one could find temporary relief. Perhaps even hell, if one could rest from time to time, would be more tolerable. He learns, though, that "*The smoke of [his] torment goes up forever and ever; and [he has] no rest day and night*" (Revelation 14:11, NASB).

No rest day and night—think of that. Thoughts of this happening to people we know, people like us, are too terrifying to entertain for long. The idea of allowing someone to endure such torture for eternity violates the sensibilities of even the most severe judge among us. We simply cannot bear it.

But our thoughts of hell will never be as unmanageable as its reality. We must take this doctrine of hell, therefore, and make sure we are practically affected by it. A hard look at this doctrine should first **change our view of sin**. Most believers do not take sin as seriously as God does. We need to realize that in God's eyes and in His actual plan, sin deserves eternal punishment in hell.

We can actually learn, by comparison, to hate sin as God hates it. As the reality of hell violates and offends us, for example, so sin violates and offends God. As we cannot bear to look upon the horrors of hell, so God cannot bear to look upon the horrors of sin. As hell revolts us to the point of hatred for it, so also God finds sin revolting. The comparison is not perfect, but it offers a start.

Second, the truth of hell should **encourage our witness**. Can we ever hear a sigh of weariness, see a moment of doubt, or feel pain without being reminded of that place? In all honesty, can we see any unbeliever, watch his petty human activities, realize what he has in store, and not be moved with compassion? It encourages us to witness in word and in deed. That hideous doctrine may grip our souls in dark terror and make us weep, but let us be sure it also prompts us to holiness and compassion.

WEDNESDAY: God's Last Word

... Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27 NIV, emphasis added).

Two thousand years ago, God spoke these words to His church as a warning to be shared. We need to grasp the implications of this incredible spiritual law from God. It is man's destiny to die. From Eden onward, anyone who sins dies. Without Christ, no one can escape death's penalty. Every person born on planet Earth is destined to die ONCE: no reincarnation, no second chance, no intermediate step. God says that life is a one-way street: no returns. Literally, it is a dead-end street. At God's final appointment with all who ever lived, without Christ, they face *judgment*. They will be lost, forever lost, and they didn't have to be—they chose to be! Meditate on the immensity of that thought! Let's now look at Revelation 20:11–15, which divides into five sobering truths.

Truth 1: The Judge is great—*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* (v. 11). God is great because of His majesty—He is the Creator, Sustainer, God of Gods, Lord of Lords, King of Kings, the Rock, and the Endless of Days! The throne is white because of His holiness; He has revealed Himself as the Light, life everlasting, and the consuming fire.

Truth 2: The judgment is inescapable—*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* (v. 12).

We know from Paul that at death believers are instantly transported to the presence of Jesus in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:6–8). As most scholars believe, the Bema Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) takes place then; as believers we are analyzed by Jesus for our degree of obedience to Him in this life, and then rewarded. John seems to imply that this event is all complete by Revelation 19:8, when the saints are at the great banquet of Christ's redeemed.

In Revelation 20:12, however, we now see the last, the greatest, and the final roll call. No one will go to hell because they didn't know about Jesus; it doesn't say that in the Bible. The only thing that will send someone to hell is sin, not failure to hear of Jesus. He is the only remedy, but the cause of hell is sin. Jesus said, "You will die in your sins." That is the most horrible thing He could say. Anyone who dies in their sins instead of being in Christ is eternally condemned at that moment, and will be banished forever from the presence of God. Why? Because God said,

"No sin will be allowed to exist eternally with Me in My holy presence. Only those whose sin is dealt with, who have Jesus as their covering, are allowed in My presence." So the works of every dead person are to be exposed: every act, thought, word, and intent of the heart is revealed one by one.

Truth 3: The standard is exact—*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* (v. 13). They will be judged both by Christ's words and by their works: "*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48). Jesus has spoken, and He has revealed Himself. Psalm 19 says that His voice has gone throughout the whole world.

All unbelievers will give an account as to why they rejected "*the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world*" (John 1:9). The Light has come to all who have been born into this world "*so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*" (Acts 17:27). Those who reject that Light cannot escape His judgment, which is a very exacting standard.

Truth 4: The sentence is final—*Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death* (v. 14). Each personal account will be finalized. The self-righteous will see that they are wearing filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). The vain babblers will be dumb before Him (Matthew 22:12). The greats of earth will be pitiful in wretchedness that day (Psalm 2:1–5). They will get their sentencing, but don't think that everyone will receive the same degree of punishment. There will be individual portions (Matthew 24:51). It will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those who were alive during Jesus' ministry and heard His words (Matthew 10:15). It will be easier for Tyre and Sidon than for the city and people of Bethsaida (Matthew 11:21–22). There are different levels of punishment within the horrors of hell. Matthew 12:42 says that the Queen of Sheba will rise up in the judgment and condemn the generation that lived through Christ's ministry. And "*Then He will also 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). God prepared the lake of fire for Satan and his angels, not for humans, but those who follow the devil and his rebellion will follow him into the lake.

Truth 5: Blessed is the Book of Life—*And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire* (v. 15). The names of all souls who experience the saving process of Jesus' blood are recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. What is our hope as those who believe in Christ? Revelation 17:8 sums it up: "*The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit [where Satan was kept for 1,000 years] and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*" Lost people—earth dwellers—are not in the Book of Life because verse 15 says that those who are in the Book of Life have eternal life.

Do you know whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life? The ones whom Jesus will bring one at a time before the Father, confessing: "This is My blood-bought child" (see Revelation 3:5).

Imagine your joy when you hear the Father saying, “Bring the best robe and put it on My child!” Jesus will say that to all who will come by faith and trust in His finished work. I now ask you what the hymn writer asks:

*Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

*Are you washed in the blood,
In the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb?
Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

—*Elisha A. Hoffman*

THURSDAY: Jesus Describes Hell

“... ‘*Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*’” (Mark 9:44, emphasis added).

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus explains that life has:

- Two **entrance gates**—the wide and the narrow.
- Two **roads**—broad and difficult.
- Two **destinations**—destruction and life.
- Two **groups of travelers**—many and few.
- Two **lifestyles**—the sayers and the doers.
- Two **inevitable ends**—being thrown into the lake of fire and entering the kingdom of heaven.

After the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifically warns everyone to flee—to avoid the lake of fire at all costs by doing whatever it takes to not end up there. He warns us over forty times in the gospel of Matthew alone. Since Jesus preached on hell so much, we need to give this doctrine, tough as it may be, the attention He wants it to have. Therefore, today and tomorrow we will look at many references in the gospel of Matthew where Jesus warned about hell. Because the doctrine of hell is being lost by our generation as a true doctrine, it would be a good idea to mark these in your Bible. (Emphasis added to the following verses.)

Jesus Describes Hell: The Pharisees and Sadducees who came to Jesus' baptism were vehemently asked, “*Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*” (Matthew 3:7). Following that

rebuke was an illustration of a tree that does not bear good fruit being “*thrown into the fire*” (3:10) and worthless chaff that is burned up “*with unquenchable fire*” (3:12).

In one of Christ’s most well-attended sermons (probably over 30,000 people), Jesus said that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause “*shall be in danger of hell fire*” (5:22). In verses 29–30, He went on to warn that if one part of your body causes you to practice sin, it is better to get rid of it than have “*your whole body to be cast into hell*.” He was convinced that there is a judgment coming for those who never turn from their sin, repent of their iniquity, and embrace Christ as their only hope. And so it was very loving to warn them of such consequences ahead.

Jesus warned to choose His narrow path because the broad one “*leads to destruction*” (7:13). The person who does not bear good fruit is to be “*thrown into the fire*” (7:19) and will hear His “*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*” (7:23). Jesus pointed out that what matters is not merely *saying* the right thing—it is what you *do* in life that counts. Everything Jesus said about salvation in all four Gospels, and the need to bear good fruit, is summarized right here in these verses where He is basically saying: “Salvation is not based on whether or not you said and did great things; it is whether or not God did something inside of you. That is what the gospel is all about. When the gospel takes root in the heart, it brings forth good fruit.”

Jesus said that the “*sons of the kingdom*” would be “*cast out into outer darkness*” (a place of inky black, impenetrable darkness) where there will be “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (8:12). In verses 28–29 we see a testimony from the other side—from a demon, an immortal intelligence, a living spirit that has phenomenal powers that are thousands of years old, and has been in the very presence of God. Look at what this demon says: “*Have You come here to torment us before the time?*” The demons know that Jesus is the judge, and that there is a time of torment and inescapable judgment coming. For them, however, there is no hope, no opportunity for salvation; they chose instead to go in rebellion with the devil, thereby denying God and going against Him. But we are the ones that the angels look at in wonder. Why? Because we have the Son of God who became a Son of Man so that the sons of men could become sons of God!

In Matthew 10:15 Jesus warned that “*it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!*” Even in hell there are levels of tolerability. For those who have grown up hearing the gospel and seeing it lived before them, it will be excruciating to have that awareness of how close they came to knowing Him, but never embracing Him, than for the person who is in hell because of being a sinner rather than rejecting Jesus. And so it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah (the land characterized by homosexuality, bestiality, and sinful, grotesque licentiousness) than for the people who have had the light of the gospel upon them. Therefore, in verse 28 Jesus says to “*fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (10:28).

Jesus warned that it would be “*more tolerable*” (Matthew 11:22–24) in the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon and the land of Sodom than for those who dwelled in cities where He’d done mighty works. Why? Because Jesus lived there; it was His hometown, and His ministry head-

quarters. Those people actually lived with God and chose to reject Him. Although they lived with the miracles of heaven around them, they told Jesus: "All that You do is great, but we really don't care about that. We want our sins more than You."

Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, would "*not be forgiven ..., either in this age or in the age to come*" (12:32). Hell is all about unforgiven, unatoned for, and uncleansed sins. In verse 36, Jesus said that for every idle word that man speaks, he will "*give account of it in the day of judgment*." No one *goes* to hell; the condemned are *cast* into hell. The initial place called Hades is where people go before the judgment, and it will only be emptied momentarily at judgment time. At the end, as it says in Revelation 20, whoever does not have his name written in the Book of Life will stand before God speechless, and acknowledge that He is just and right to send them to hell.

FRIDAY: More of What Jesus Says about Hell

[Apostates will be] ... *wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever* (Jude 13b, emphasis added).

In the following verses, Jesus gets even more graphic in His description: "*Let both grow together until the harvest, and I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn""*" (Matthew 13:30) ... *Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age* (13:40). ... "*And [the angels] will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth*" (13:42). In verse 48 we see that when the dragnet "... was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but *threw the bad away*."

Jesus said to let the true and the false, the fruit bearers and the non-fruit bearers, grow together. In the church, there are some who merely appear to be Christians. They can "talk the talk" and even seem to "walk the walk" so well that it is difficult to sort out the real Christians from the fake. It is like wheat and tares, all growing up in the same field. Jesus was saying, "Don't clear out the church. There will always be believers and unbelievers, but let them be together. At the time of the harvest, I will sort them out." Notice that all of Jesus' stories are clear-cut choices: good and bad; righteous and evil; fruit bearing and not fruit bearing; heaven and fire. There is no middle ground here—either you make it or you don't. In verses 49-50 Jesus therefore warns: "*So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*"

In Matthew 15:13-14, Jesus said, "*Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.*"

Now look at these verses: "... *You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.... For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the*

whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (16:18, 25–27).

Jesus also told a lot of parables and stories that don't have what we would call a happy ending. In Matthew 18:34 Jesus speaks about the agony in life of having bitterness and anger: "... *His master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.*" These "torturers of life" that we don't deal with—emotional pain, depression, and anger—are merely a tiny foretaste of the horrors of hell.

The judgment of the Jewish leaders against the wicked vinedressers turned out to be Christ's judgment against them: "*He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons. ... And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder*" (21:41, 44). This is speaking again of the intensity of the eternal judgment.

In Matthew 22:7 we see another picture of what judgment will be like: "... *When the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.*" Jesus continued in verse 13: "*Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*"

Jesus sternly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees: "... *Hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. ... For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves*" (23:14–15). Now look at verse 33: "*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*"

Jesus said that the master of an unfaithful evil servant will come, when he least expects him, to "*cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (24:51). The weeping is because of the pain, and the gnashing of the teeth and wailing is due to the inescapable punishment.

Matthew 25:30 speaks of the unprofitable servant who will be cast "*into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" Have you heard this enough to catch your attention? In verse 41 are Christ's last words about hell; this is the judgment, and Jesus is sitting on the throne: "*Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*"

Hell was not made for humans. God did not plan for, and want to deliver, the lost to the place of everlasting judgment. Therefore, He is not willing that any should perish. Now tie that with John 3:16: "... *that they should not perish but have everlasting life.*" God does not want you to go to the everlasting fire. It was prepared for the devil and his angels. But look at verse 46: "*And these [the cursed who practice iniquity—who reject Christ, and refuse to believe and repent] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*"

Life in heaven will be endless, but so will life in hell. The only reason hell even exists for mankind is because they love their sins instead of the living and written Word of God. Have

you embraced God and His Word? Are you sharing His gospel with others so that they do not become cursed and end up being cast into the everlasting fire?

SATURDAY: The Apostles Add Their Warnings of Hell

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences (2 Corinthians 5:11a, emphasis added).

Now that we have seen what Jesus spoke about hell, let us finish up this subject with what Paul, Peter, Jude, John, and the writer of Hebrews had to say on this subject. (Emphasis added to the verses.)

Paul wrote: ... ***tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil*** ... (Romans 2:9). In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 he said, *These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power* The writer of Hebrews warned, *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Hebrews 10:31). And Peter had this to say: ... *God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment* ... (2 Peter 2:4).

In Jude 6 we learn that ... *the angels who did not keep their proper domain, ... He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day* The apostates will be *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire* (v. 7). They are like ... *wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever* (v.13). (See Jude 6–13 for a complete description of this judgment.)

In Revelation 14:11 we are told: *"And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."*

Now look at Revelation 19:20: *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 those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.*

Finally, in Revelation 20:10-12, 14–15, we see: *The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 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. ... 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.*

What happens when we receive the Word of God? Why did the rich man of Luke 16 go to hell? What happened to him? He refused to let the Word of God change him; it never pierced his heart. When God's Word is received by faith, our life begins to change: self-centeredness begins to die; self-indulgence begins to be disciplined away; self-sacrifice begins to be pursued; and compassion, kindness, caring, and love take root and grow.

Make a choice to live in hope. This has been a hard week's reading, hasn't it? Although it is painful to have your eyes opened to the realities of the horrors of hell, it is absolutely essential that you not be "in the dark" regarding the truth about this doctrine.

What is the most important point that I want to drive home in this week's devotionals? This amazing truth—Jesus Christ died for sinners. All who receive Him are forgiven of their sins—past, present, and future. All who are forgiven receive eternal life!

Have you received Jesus Christ? Do you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that your sins have been removed? If they have not been, I exhort you, with all that is within me, to delay no longer! No one knows how long they will live, and you could be ushered into eternity at any moment. Oh, dear reader, make a choice to live in hope. Choose to bow your knee to Jesus Christ, who loves you and gave Himself for you!

If you know the Lord Jesus, quietly rejoice in your heart that you have been born again, and then glorify the Lord by worshipfully and gratefully singing this song to Him.

Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning [my] song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty!
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!*

*Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Which wert and art and evermore shalt be.*

*Holy, Holy, Holy! Tho the darkness hide Thee,
Tho the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;
Only Thou art holy—there is none beside Thee
Perfect in pow'r, in love and purity.*

*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!*

—Reginald Heber, 1783–1826

Week 46—Taste the Joys of Heaven

(Revelation 21–22)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you taste the joys of heaven!



SUNDAY: Thoughts on Heaven

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2, emphasis added).

When you think of heaven, what comes to mind? As for me, thoughts of heaven always lead back to sweet memories of my being a little boy in Sunday school and singing this song: *I'm going to heaven, can't wait; Going to see Jesus, can't wait; heaven is wonderful, bright and fair, Praise the Lord, I'm going there!*

A childlike wonder permeates the minds and hearts of the very young—especially when it comes to things of the Lord. Thus, little lambs can joyfully think: *Can't wait to get to heaven!* But as lambs grow into sheep, the manifold distractions of this world can crowd out that joy ... childlike wonder begins to fade ... and that sweet song of a soft heart changes to: *I'm going to heaven, but it can wait; going to see Jesus, but He can wait; heaven is wonderful, bright and fair, praise the Lord—but it can wait!* In other words: *heaven with Jesus sounds wonderful, but let's hold it off for a little while!*

Isn't that how we become as we age? Usually, not until we are approaching the end of our lives do our thoughts go back to: *Can't wait to get to heaven!* It is that in-between time when we are at the greatest risk of heaven losing its wonder in our minds and hearts. If we're honest, most of us would say that we are hoping for heaven, but not just yet. Why is that?

Dave Hunt comments, "For most Christians heaven is a place they desire to reach eventually, but not until they have lived out their full days on earth. Their hopes, ambitions, and interests, contrary to what Christ taught and the early Church lived, are really bound up in the life they aspire to live in this world. Heaven is a distant and unreal destination they reluctantly expect to reach at the

end of life, but it is not desired before then. To be suddenly raptured to heaven would be, for most Christians, an unwelcome interruption of their earthly plans and ambitions.”¹

Most of us have thus forgotten how to embrace the awe of being in our Father’s house! Restoring that childlike wonder is my goal for this week’s devotionals. And it is my heartfelt prayer that when you have finished on Saturday, your heart will rejoice, knowing that this old world is not your final destination!

Would the Rapture be an unwelcome interruption of the plans you have for this life, or your greatest joy? Are you an earth dweller at heart, or a pilgrim who longs for “heaven’s open door”?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Father, we do thank You for heaven! We thank You that the writer of Hebrews says this hope we have is an anchor of our souls. Oh Lord, we pray that You will make sure that we are believing the truth about You, and following the way that You would have us to go. Open our minds and hearts to embrace the truth as we detach ourselves from this place and choose to attach our affections upon heaven—to look forward to our Father’s house. We thank You for what You will teach us! In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: In My Father’s House

“In My Father’s house are many mansions ...” (John 14:2a, emphasis added).

Christ’s promise to us in John 14:1–6 comes in the language of the Bible, and it is bound by culture and time. Therefore, understanding the Scriptures involves more than knowing what the words mean. We need to understand those words from the perspective of the people that God chose both to write them and to have those words communicated to them in the New Testament world. Therefore the people God chose as His instruments, the people to whom He revealed Himself, were Hebrews living in the Near East. We can’t divorce ourselves from that context or we won’t fully understand God’s Word. Remember the world is divided into Oriental and Occidental—we’re Occidental, a western culture. They are Oriental—an eastern culture—so they think in terms of concrete reality. The western world is more into ideas and the defined mode rather than the concrete mode, which is the Hebrew and Greek languages. Their language was one of pictures, metaphors, and examples rather than ideas, definitions, and abstractions.²

If we were to have a little concert of worship in today’s church vernacular, someone might say, “Oh, God, I praise Your mighty omniscience!” Or another might say, “I am so grateful for Your omnipotence!” But you wouldn’t hear those kinds of words in a Hebrew prayer meeting. A Hebrew preferred to pray: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Do you know what that means to the Hebrew? “The Lord is all-knowing; He never slumbers or sleeps; He is all-providing; He watches over us night and day, and leads us.” They are saying that God is the One who is not only with them but also provides for them.

Now look at the concrete imagery of John 14:1–6 as we go through this passage:

- “*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.*”—Jesus is speaking to His disciples, who don’t know what’s ahead.
- “*In My Father’s house*”—this is a description of heaven!
- “*are many mansions*”—these are dwelling places, nests, places of rest—an innumerable amount of rooms are there.
- “*if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you*”—heaven isn’t an idea, or merely another dimension; it is a place. Jesus is saying, “I am going away to prepare a special place for you, so be sure that you have your room reserved!” He is preparing a place for all those who make prior reservations before they leave this earth (that is what salvation is about).
- “*And if I go and prepare a place for you*”—“*a place*” speaks of an individual room for each of His children.
- “*I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.*”—If you search the Scriptures, you know all about this because heaven covers the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. And what beautiful pictures they are!
- *Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”*—Thomas is speaking here for all of us!
- *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”*—Jesus told them, “I am the Way to heaven, the Truth about heaven, and the Life that you long for because you will have My unbroken presence!”
- “*No one comes to the Father except through Me.*”—Coming to the Father is the same as going to live in the Father’s house, and Jesus is the Door through which we must enter.

Heaven is the unbroken presence of God forever, the unsoled shores of paradise, the unending enjoyment of the living and true almighty Lord of heaven and earth. Thus heaven has always been the source of comfort, hope, and focus of God’s servants.

When Christ’s disciples felt extremely distressed in their hearts because He told them He was going to die and not be with them anymore, Jesus comforted them with heaven. Heaven is what those in the Coliseum clung to as they went to their deaths in the arena. Thoughts of heaven

gave enduring hope to those in the dungeons, going through the fires of persecution and dying for their faith. They all clung to heaven as their secure hope for the future. We, too, should cling to heaven because Jesus intended that heaven be our comfort as we walk His path on earth.

The early church lived in such a way that they looked every day for Christ. When they saw the sun rising, their thoughts turned to: *When morning gilds the sky my heart awaking cries, may Jesus Christ be praised—perhaps today He will come ...* That is what those early believers lived, which is so often remote from our culture. We plan our lives so far in advance that if the Rapture happened this week it would ruin our plans. We should be planning according to *His* plans! Yes, we need to prepare wisely for the future, but the real need we have is to long for heaven. That should take precedence over any personal agendas. Long for your Father's house, but most of all, long for Jesus!

TUESDAY: Heaven Is a Dwelling Place

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2, emphasis added).

Heaven is the eternal and very distant world that is the abode of God, the angels, and glorified believers. But to help us grasp some of its wonder, join me in a look at: **What is heaven?**³

Heaven is a dwelling place. Jesus has told us that there are many dwelling places in His Father's house. The most frequent association with heaven is that it is the place where God dwells. Although God is the central inhabitant of heaven, He is not its only resident. The angels live there as well, as more than a dozen verses tell us. The company of the redeemed also lives in heaven; at the end of Elijah's earthly life, God took him up to heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1), and Revelation repeatedly portrays glorified saints as inhabiting heaven. A preponderance of the Bible's pictures of heaven show it to be a crowded place.

When you think about heaven, though, don't consider it to be an endlessly huge place. Think about it in Bible terms. Let me show you one that just makes me chuckle—a reference to heaven in the Old Testament. I love this one because it reminds me of our family of ten! (You might say that our home is "a little bit like heaven" in this sense.) Right in the middle of warning King Ahab about the consequences of his sin, there is this little note in 1 Kings 22:19: *Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left."*

What is that all about? Well, heaven might be huge, but the idea is that everybody will be crowded right around the throne—as close as they can get to God! Do you see what it is? Heaven is shown to be a massive place that could house 100 billion people—each having a room with space that would equal the size of a whole palace of their own. Yet, in spite of that, the descriptions of heaven almost remind me of what my beehives look like: the queen bee is right there, and all the bees are gathered together as close to her as they can get. That is what heaven is like: we will all be gathered together around our heavenly Father's throne just to be near Him!

What does that have to do with my home? When Bonnie and I are brushing our teeth, I'd say that 90 percent of our family is standing right there by us brushing their teeth as well. And if Bonnie is in our kitchen, everybody is right around her in the kitchen. Why does my family stay so close by? Because we love to be together! Do you know what heaven is? A dwelling place of those who want, more than anything else, to be where God is. They want to adore Him, worship Him, magnify Him, see Him, know Him, and be with Him! For that reason, Jesus was named Emmanuel, "*God with us*," so that we could be with God!

Being with God forever is the fulfillment of everything about which the Scriptures speak. God created Adam and Eve for fellowship with Him, and to walk with Him, but they fell into sin and broke that bond of fellowship. So, through Jesus, He came back to redeem them—to bring them to Himself by offering a means of escape from the curse of sin—from the penalty they incurred because of their transgression. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ became the fulfillment of those promises (Matthew 1:21, 23).

God came to be with us so that we can go to be with Him. The ultimate description of heaven is the dwelling place where we get to be with God. We get to know Him, to be like Him, to see Him as He is. We get to spend forever with the One who loved us and gave Himself for us! If we die in our sleep, as David said, "When I awake, I will awake in Your likeness because I want to be like You, and I want to be with You" (see Psalm 17:15).

WEDNESDAY: Heaven Is a Real Place

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2, emphasis added).

I want to underline in your mind that heaven is not an idea alone. In the Bible, heaven is emphatically a definite locale. To enter it is to enter a definite space. In the verse above, note that Jesus specifically said that He was going to prepare "*a place*." If we ask where this heavenly place is, the answer overwhelmingly is that it is above the planet Earth. Vertical imagery dominates in the placing of it.

Heaven is a place from which God looks down to the earth: *The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God* (Psalm 14:2 NIV). Psalm 80:14 says, ... *O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see!* ... (NIV). And in Psalm 102:19, *The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth* (NIV).

So what is heaven? Not only the dwelling place of God, but it has an incredible vertical imagery. It is the place, first of all, from which God looks down upon us.

Heaven is the place from which Christ came down: *"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world"* (John 6:33). The Bible describes heaven not only as the place from which God looks down upon the earth but also the place from which Christ came down to the earth.

Jesus said, “*For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me ... I am the bread which came down from heaven*” (John 6:38, 41). So where is heaven? God says, “I am above you—looking down at you!” That is where heaven is, and that is where Jesus came from. For that reason the Jews grumbled at Him saying, “*Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven?’*” (John 6:42).

Heaven is the place to which people look up from earth: “*It [the Truth] is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?”*” (Deuteronomy 30:12 NIV). When Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal, *the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind ...* (2 Kings 2:1 NIV).

In Luke 18:13, the repentant tax collector “... would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’” (NIV). Jesus said that when you raise your eyes toward the sky, you are looking toward heaven.

Heaven is the place to which Christ ascended after His earthly life. As He was ascending, *They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:10-11 NIV). Did you catch the vertical imagery of heaven in these verses? Amazing! Heaven is the place to which Christ ascended after His earthly life; the place to which people look up from earth; the place from which Christ came down; and the place from which God looks down upon us!

Heaven is a literal dwelling place—a place of absolute security. Heaven is always described as being “up” from our perspective of living on earth. Heaven is remote from earth, a higher and superior mode of existence, and a regal place of supreme authority. It is the command center; it is the place where we can be secure. This is indicated by nearly a dozen references to God’s throne being situated in heaven. This royal quality indicates both the splendor of heaven and the authority of the God who rules the universe from heaven.

Heaven is sometimes the regal palace of the King of the Universe. It has many rooms, specifically prepared by Christ for His followers, leading us to view it as a place where people live (John 14:1–3).

Heaven sometimes has the features of a celestial temple. This is in keeping with the worship that occurs there: ... *I saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple* (Isaiah 6:1 NIV). Now look at Revelation 3:12: “*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.*”

“*He who overcomes*” represents every born-again believer. And every true child of God will become “*a pillar in the temple of God*” never again to leave God’s presence; we will forever be His servants. This is a command center in heaven, and God will write His name on each

believer, and the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from God.

I could take a piece of paper and write just three lines on it—and that one piece of paper would find its way to one person out of six billion if I included the name, address, city, state, and country. Just three lines can separate one person from six billion! Do you want to have some security? In Revelation 3:12, God is saying, “When you are born again, I am addressing you for heaven, so you can be sure to arrive safely. I identify you as Mine, one out of billions, and you are going to go to the place I’ve prepared for you, a place of ultimate security.”

More than anything else—heaven is a city. In Revelation 20-22 we see that this city is replete with walls, gates, and streets. This testifies to us as believers being united in one place in the worship of God. We are all going to be delivered securely to a city in heaven that is perfect and eternal. But though a city, it is unlike any city we know here on earth, for this city also possesses the features of an earthly paradise. We will have the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). There is also the crystal-clear river of life that flows from the throne of God. On each side of the river is the tree of life, that bears twelve crops of fruit every year, and its leaves are for healing the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).

Just think: in heaven, we will also be with all our brothers and sisters in Christ! And the great blessing is that we won’t be together for just a visit now and then—but for eternity!

THURSDAY: Heaven Is a Permanent Place

He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God
(Hebrews 11:10, emphasis added).

Poets have always depended on artistic imagery when portraying heaven. Such images combine hardness of texture and brilliance of light to suggest a realm of superior permanence, value, and splendor, when compared with the cyclic, vegetative world in which we live. Jewel imagery is the most prevalent type of artistic imagery.

Ezekiel’s vision of a heavenly level of reality is replete with such imagery: flashing fire and lightning, burnished bronze that sparkles, gleaming chrysolite, and sapphire (see Ezekiel 1). To this we can add the memorable pictures in Revelation of a sea of glass, like crystal; the appearance of God in splendor like that of jasper and carnelian; golden crowns, gates of pearl, and a city of pure gold. In addition to jeweled imagery, physical light and its equivalent—glory—are recurrent in biblical images of heaven. In the heaven portrayed in Revelation, the light of the sun and moon are no longer needed ... *for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light...* (Revelation 21:23-24 NIV). *There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever* (Revelation 22:5 NIV).

Heaven is a holy place. The purity of existence in heaven and the spiritual perfection of those who are “enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23) are expressed by imagery of washed robes

(Revelation 7:14), white garments (Revelation 3:5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13), clothing of “*fine linen, bright and clean*” (Revelation 19:8 NIV), and chaste people who are “spotless” (Revelation 14:4–5).

Daniel pictures the people as shining “*like the stars forever and ever*” (Daniel 12:3)—symbolic of permanence and glory. Revelation also pictures the redeemed receiving such things as the morning star (Revelation 2:28), a white stone with a secret name written on it (Revelation 2:17), and water from a fountain of life (Revelation 21:6). Similarly, those who enter heaven will become pillars in the temple of God (Revelation 3:12).

Heaven is an unimaginable place. While not a major part of the images of heaven, beings that have never existed in human experience are included in the visions of Ezekiel and Revelation. Examples from Ezekiel’s vision include living creatures with four faces, four wings, and soles like those of a calf’s foot (Ezekiel 1:6–7). These creatures move about in a riot of motion, and something that looks like torches of fire moves among them (Ezekiel 1:13). There is a celestial chariot replete with gleaming wheels that have rims full of eyes (Ezekiel 1:15–18). *The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels* (Ezekiel 1:21)—which mystifies us still further. Revelation’s pictures of creatures with six wings ... *full of eyes in front and in back* (Revelation 4:6–8) likewise contain the motif of strangeness.

The effect of all this is to reinforce the difference between heaven and earth and to underscore the sense of mystery surrounding heaven. The far reaches of incomprehensibility enter when we read: “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Heaven is a worship-focused place. Compared to the relatively plentiful descriptions of heaven as a place, the Bible gives little information about the activity that transpires there. Activity in heaven consists almost entirely of worship (see Revelation 4; 5; 7:9–12). Revelation 14:4 adds the picture of the redeemed following the Lamb wherever He goes. We also read that God will “*dwell*” with his people and “*be with them*” (Revelation 21:3). In addition, there is also the transformation of our earthly experience into a different mode.

Half of the equation is the negation or canceling out of fallen earthly experience. There will be no more hunger or thirst, no more scorching heat (Revelation 7:16). God will wipe tears away and death shall be no more (Revelation 7:17; 21:4); mourning and pain will vanish, “... *for the former things have passed away*” (Revelation 21:4). As part of this exclusion of evil, heaven is a protected place: nothing unclean shall enter it or anything ... *that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie* ... (Revelation 21:27). The sheer freedom from fallen experience is pictured by city gates that ... *shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)* (Revelation 21:25).

The other half of the equation is the creation of earthly categories into something “new.” The main example is the new heaven and new earth that fills the last two chapters of the Bible, as well as the image of New Jerusalem, with its suggestion of earthly reality raised to a higher level of perfection. The writer of Hebrews claims that people of faith ... *desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one* (Hebrews 11:16 NASB).

Heaven is a joyously satisfying place. The two dominant human responses to new life in heaven are joy and satisfaction. The joy of heaven’s inhabitants is pictured by the scenes of

praise in Revelation, the white-robed conquerors waving palm branches (Revelation 7:9), and the guests at the wedding supper (Revelation 19:1–9). This is buttressed by the imagery of some of Jesus' parables, where attaining heaven is 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. Hebrews 11:13–14 employs the imagery of quest to express this reality: *These all died in faith, not having received the promises ... For ... they seek a homeland.*

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, too, in Peter's vision of ... *the Chief Shepherd* ... conferring ... *the crown of glory* ... on those who have served faithfully (1 Peter 5:4).

There is also the glorious picture of believers having come to *Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God* ... *to thousands upon thousands of angels 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 NIV) and having access to ... *the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month* ... (Revelation 22:2 RSV).

Heaven is a rest after labor. Those who die in the Lord "... *rest from their labors, and their works follow them*" (Revelation 14:13). Similarly, ... *there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; which believers ... strive to enter* ... (Hebrews 4:9, 11 RSV).

Author and pastor John Piper once said, "The radical pursuit of joy in God may cost you your life. ... But it will be worth it. The world has an inconsolable longing, which it tries to satisfy with anything but God. Scenic vacations. Sexual exploits. Ascetic rigors. Managerial excellence. Sports extravaganzas. We have turned our back on the breathtaking beauty of God and fallen in love with our shadow. To delight in the Light is a dangerous duty indeed. It may cost you your friends. It may cost you your reputation. It may cost you your life. But it will be worth it. Because the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life (Psalm 63:3)!"⁴

FRIDAY: Entering Heaven

And Jesus said to him, "... today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, emphasis added).

If the Lord tarries, each of us will cross through the valley of the shadow of death to enter heaven. Erwin Lutzer tells a wonderful story about dying grace. He writes: "When Corrie ten Boom was a girl, her first experience with death came after visiting the home of a neighbor who had just died. When she thought of the fact that her parents would die someday, her father comforted her by asking, 'When I go to Amsterdam, when do I give you your ticket?' 'Just before we get on the train.' 'Exactly. Just so your heavenly Father will give you exactly what you need when we die—He'll give it to you just when you need it.'"⁵

To have dying grace does not mean that we will be free from sorrow, whether at our own impending death or the death of someone we love. Some Christians have mistakenly thought that grief demonstrates a lack of faith. Thus they have felt it necessary to maintain strength rather than deal honestly with a painful loss (Hebrews 5:7).

As Christians, we live with the tension between what is “already ours” and the “not yet” of our experience. Paul said believers should look forward to Christ’s return ... *that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope* (1 Thessalonians 4:13 NASB). Grief was expected, but it is different from the grief of the world. There is a difference between tears of hope and tears of hopelessness.

“Donald Grey Barnhouse, on the way home from the funeral of his first wife, was trying to think of some way of comforting his children. Just then a huge moving van passed by their car and its shadow swept over them. Instantly, Barnhouse asked, ‘Children, would you rather be run over by a truck or by its shadow?’ The children replied, ‘Of course we’d prefer the shadow!’ To which Barnhouse replied, ‘Two thousand years ago the truck of death ran over the Lord Jesus ... now only the shadow of death can run over us!’ (see Psalm 23:4). Death is the chariot our heavenly Father sends to bring us to Himself.”⁶

We are accustomed to talking about the differences there will be when we make our transition from earth to heaven, but there are also some similarities. Given the fact that *our personalities continue*, we can expect continuity. Heaven is the continuation of the glorified and perfected earthly life of the believer.

Personal knowledge continues in heaven. (See Matthew 8:11.) Jesus said at the banquet in heaven we will sit and fellowship with people we know about—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Personal love continues in heaven. I like what a news article once attributed to Chet Bitterman after his missionary son was killed by guerrillas: “We have eight children. And they all are living: one’s in heaven and seven are on earth.” (See Romans 8:18.)

Personal feelings continue in heaven. (See Psalm 16:11; Revelation 6:9–10; 7:17; 21:4.) David was promised that when he was at last in the presence of God he would experience the emotion of “fullness of joy”!

Personal activities continue in heaven. “We are,” says Maclaren, “saplings here, but we shall be transported into our heavenly soil to grow in God’s light. Here our abilities are in blossom; there they shall burst forth with fruits of greater beauty. Our death is but the passing from one degree of loving service to another; the difference is like that of the unborn child and the one who has entered into the experiences of a new life. Our love for God will continue, but awakened with new purity and purposefulness.”⁷

There is no intermediate state. (See 2 Corinthians 5:1 and Revelation 6:9–10.) Believers go directly into the presence of Christ at their moment of death or at His gathering of the church at the Rapture. They are conscious and in command of all of their faculties.

We will each have a resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). We are sown a perishable body, but we will be raised imperishable. Like a seed sown in the ground, there is continuity between the acorn and the tree, between the kernel and the stalk. Not every particle that ever

was a part of you has to be raised, and God just might add additional material to make up the deficiencies. In heaven, no one will comment on your age or notice that the years are beginning to take their toll. You will look as young a billion years from now as you will a thousand years from now. As Dr. Hinson wrote: "The stars shall live for a million years, A million years and a day. But God and I will live and love when the stars have passed away."⁸

We are sown in dishonor, but raised in power. When a body is transported to a funeral home, it is always covered by a sheet to shield gaping eyes from the ignominy of looking upon the corpse. Every dead body is a reminder of our dishonor, a reminder that we are but frail. However, we shall be raised in power.

We are sown in weakness, but raised in strength. The resurrection body is not subject to material forces. Remember how Christ came through closed doors after the Resurrection. Keep in mind that the reason the angel rolled the stone from the tomb was not to let Christ out, but to let the disciples in!

We are sown a natural body, but we are raised a spiritual body. To say that we will have a spiritual body does not mean that we will just be spirits. Christ's glorified body was so human that He invited the disciples to touch Him and affirmed, "*See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have*" (Luke 24:39 NASB). There will be continuity with a difference. Our future body will be like Christ's resurrection body: "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). Just think of the implications. See Revelation 19:7¹⁹

SATURDAY: Heaven—The Place to Be

*"In my Father's house are many rooms; ... I am going there to prepare a place for you. And ... I will come back and take you to be with me **that you also may be where I am**" (John 14:2–3 NIV, emphasis added).*

What we need to believe today is what Jesus taught us—this world is not our home. Our real home is the one He went to prepare for us. All that we see, use, and have here on earth is only temporary. That is the key to a pilgrim view of life.

In John 14:2–3, Jesus assures us that death for His children is only a transfer to permanent housing. Paul declares: *... as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:6–8 NIV).

The great English Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, might reflect our feelings best: "Would you like to know where I am? I am at home in my father's house, in the mansion prepared for me here. I am where I want to be—no longer on the stormy sea, but in God's safe, quiet harbor. My sowing time is done and I am reaping; my joy is the joy of the harvest."

"Would you like to know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness. Grace is swallowed up in glory. Would you like to know what I am doing? I see God, not as through a glass darkly,

but face to face. I am engaged in the sweet enjoyment of my precious redeemer. I am singing hallelujahs to him who sits upon the throne, and I am constantly praising him.

"Would you like to know what blessed company I keep? It is better than the best of earth. Here are the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am with many of my old acquaintances with whom I worked and prayed and have come here before me.

"Lastly, would you like to know how long this will continue? It is a dawn that never fades. After millions and millions of ages, it will be as fresh as it is now. Therefore, weep not for me!"¹⁰

Oh, the wonders of our promised haven, the glories of that eternal home! But nothing will compare with the knowledge that heaven is the outflow of Jesus Christ. Let us seek Him, like the words of this song so true: "*'Tis heaven below, my Redeemer to know, For He is so precious to me.*" That is heaven.

"My Redeemer to know" is what God created us for; that is what Jesus is preparing for us; and that is what He's coming again for, either in a personal rapture through the valley of the shadow of death or in a corporate rapture when He comes to take His church home—but He *will* come again to take us to that place!

Make a choice to live in hope. As Christians, we look forward to an event that will pale all others. It will happen the second we pass through death's shadow into heaven's splendor and see our Lord face-to-face: "Think of—Stepping on shore, and finding it Heaven! Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God's hand. Of breathing a new air, and finding it celestial air. Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality. Of passing from storm to tempest to an unbroken calm. Of waking up, and finding it Home."¹¹

What a thrilling moment! Thinking about it can make our hearts beat faster! So rejoice in heaven! Rejoice in what your Father has done—and is doing for you even now: ... *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 ...—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Romans 8:15–18).

Make a choice to live securely in hope because you have a relationship with God that allows you to cry out to Him, "Abba, Father" (a term of endearment meaning "Daddy" or "Papa")! As His child, heaven means "going home to Daddy"—to enjoy His presence forever! Whatever you go through before your home-going will only make your time in heaven more precious because of remembering His Son's sacrifice of love and His faithful companionship during your sojourn on earth. You are a joint heir with Jesus—to be glorified together with Him! What a joyous privilege!

Isn't it hard to live in a tiny two-room apartment when you know that you will soon get a mansion and gardens—and will live forever with the Lord in paradise?

Week 47—Discover Our Marriage to Jesus

(Revelation 21:1–8)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you discover our marriage to Jesus!



SUNDAY: The Bride's Perfect Home

I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2, emphasis added).

Last week you got to have a taste of the joys of heaven! I hope that you will now savor learning even more about the glories of heaven—just as an amazingly brilliant scientist, Dr. Harry Rimmer, did in his lifetime. In 1953, only a week before his death, he shared his unique perspective of the city of gold in a letter to the great radio Bible teacher, Dr. Charles Fuller, who was just starting a series on heaven. As you read Dr. Rimmer’s letter, ask yourself: *Is my confidence as firm as his?*

“Next Sunday you are to talk about Heaven. I am interested in that land, because I have held a clear title to a bit of property there for more than fifty-five years. I did not buy it. It was given to me ‘without money and without price.’ But the donor purchased it for me at a tremendous sacrifice. I am not holding it for speculation, since the title is not transferable. It is not a vacant lot.

“For more than half a century I have been sending materials, out of which the Great Architect and Builder of the Universe has been building a home for me, a home which will never be remodeled nor repaired, because it will suit me perfectly, individually, and will never grow old. Termites can never undermine its foundations, for they rest upon the Rock of Ages. Fire cannot destroy it. Floods cannot wash it away. No locks nor bolts will ever be placed on its doors, for no vicious person can ever enter that Land where my dwelling stands, now almost completed and almost ready for me to enter in and abide in peace eternally, without fear of being ejected.

“There is a valley of deep shadows between the place where I live in California and that to which I shall journey in a very short time. I cannot reach my home in that City of Gold without passing through this dark valley of shadows; but I am not afraid, because the best Friend I ever

had went through the same valley long, long, ago and drove away all its gloom. He has stuck by me through thick and thin since we first became acquainted fifty-five years ago, and I hold His promise in printed form that He will never forsake me nor leave me alone. He will be with me as I walk through the valley of shadows, and I shall not lose my way when He is with me.”¹

In Revelation 21 we find Jesus taking His bride home to a world that is perfect—just as God wants it to be. What will heaven be like? It certainly won’t be that of sitting around on clouds playing harps for eternity, as some would have us think. No, God paints an entirely different picture in His Word:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:1–8).

Didn’t God paint a beautiful picture of heaven for us? Are you longing for the time when we will all be together with Him forever?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh Lord God, our Father, Creator, and builder of that glorious home You are preparing for us, we love You! Thank You that You are going to make all things new so that we need not despair about our bodies getting old or our world decaying. Nothing is enduring here because our pilgrimage is heading us to the Celestial City, to a building not made with hands, to a place that has foundations that shall never be moved. We praise You, Lord Jesus, for purchasing our place of abode forever with Your own blood! We pray that by Your grace we will enjoy discovering more of the wonders of heaven—the mansions of Jesus to which we are headed, and where we long to be. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. As we wait, may we not be ashamed before You when You come. Thank You for what great things You will do in our lives today as we bow before You. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: What Will the New Heaven Be Like?

*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man **the things which God has prepared for those who love Him**"* (1 Corinthians 2:9, emphasis added).

In Revelation 21, I want you to understand these points in particular: heaven is made of new materials; heaven includes the New Jerusalem; and heaven is inhabited by new people. So then, let us look at these aspects of the new heaven.

The heavens and the earth will be made of new materials (21:1). In verse 1, God says that there will be *no more sea*. To the ancients, the seas were dangerous, unpredictable, and caused separation. So it is a glorious thought that God is going to make everything new—including us! Everything will be affected right down to the atomic level. There is a dissonance in the core of every atom—an atomic flux. Paul said that the whole universe is groaning, waiting for the redemption, because Satan, his rebellion, and evil have infected the universe.

Look at what Peter says in 2 Peter 3:10-13: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements [at an atomic level] will melt with fervent heat; 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, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God ...? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* (2 Peter 3:10-13, emphasis added).

This passage is not describing the Rapture, because the Rapture does not come as a thief in the night. That has a negative connotation, but the coming of Christ to take His own to be with Him is a positive thing. The *day of the Lord* (the major theme of Old Testament prophetic writings) speaks of His return in glory and judgment at the Second Coming. Peter (who wrote after Paul explained the two-part Second Coming of Christ to the Thessalonians and Corinthians) merely lumps all the Old Testament and New Testament prophetic events together; he truncates the whole thing into the *day of the Lord*.

Peter envisioned what we see in Revelation 21:1a: *I saw a new heaven and a new earth* That which Peter and all the Old Testament prophets longed for is what finally comes about in Revelation 21—the heavens and the earth will be made new. The original was not a failure; rather, God is going to correct and triumph over His initial Creation where He allowed man to go into sin and then redeemed him. The place where God intersected with time, winning the victory and paying the price for man's salvation, will be redeemed and made brand new.

Heaven includes a New Jerusalem (21:2, 10): *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city* The concept here is like that of a John Wayne western movie in which the hero conquers all the bad guys, and then takes his bride up to the top of the hill to show her his ranch. We are the bride on the honeymoon, and our glorious husband, who

paid a great price for us, will take us to a mountaintop to show off the gorgeous lay of His land. The One crucified in the old Jerusalem will now be crowned in the New Jerusalem.

The gospel message is that the Lamb is the foundation *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets [the church], Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone* (Ephesians 2:20). The foundation of the New Jerusalem is the Lamb.

Heaven is founded on the Lamb and His sacrifice. The New Jerusalem is the city that all saints of all time have been waiting and longing for: [Abraham] *waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ... These all [the heroes of the faith] died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them [the promises of God] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ... They desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them* (Hebrews 11:10, 13, 16).

Born in 2166 B.C., Abraham was looking for this city. He knew what it was because God had revealed it to him. All of the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 lived their lives with it being *very far off*. Isaiah said, *Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will see the land that is very far off* (Isaiah 33:17). In spite of that, they embraced the promises of God and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (a rare attitude today).

When we desire a better country, a heavenly one, God is pleased to be called our God, and He has prepared a city for us: it is a holy city (Revelation 21:27); it is a prepared city (John 14:1–6); and it is a gorgeous city (Revelation 21:10–21).

Heaven is inhabited by new people (21:3–8). At last, Christ's High Priestly prayer "*that they may be as one*" will be fulfilled (John 17:11). His prayer was not only for His twelve disciples but also for those in the future who would believe. Until this point in Revelation, the church will never have been truly united. Some in the Old Testament were in "the waiting room" of Abraham's bosom, but after His Resurrection Jesus took them to be with Him. However, they presently are still waiting for all the redeemed to come home too. The people yet to be redeemed will be gathered together in Revelation 21. John 17 will then be fulfilled when we are all finally united as one—from Eden's first redeemed to the last of every kindred, nation, and tribe. All repentant sinners, transformed by grace, will live together in this new heaven. Will you be among them?

TUESDAY: What Will and Will Not Be in Heaven

But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, ... but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27, emphasis added).

What will be in heaven? Fellowship: visible, face-to-face communion with Christ for we shall see His face, and His name shall be on [our] foreheads (Revelation 22:4). That is what I long for! First Corinthians 13:12 says that *for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face*

Now look at this great passage: *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! ... it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but*

we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:1–2).

That is what we are waiting for. All that God has when we see Him face-to-face will then come into fruition. At that time, we will have full and complete **knowledge**: ... *Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known* (1 Corinthians 13:12b).

We will have **abundance** without charge, restrictions, or restraint: ... *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End ...* (Revelation 21:6). Christ said that He is the initiator and the satisfier. We will possess all that God has promised us, and no longer be limited by our frailties and flesh.

We will have meaningful **service**: *And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him* (Revelation 22:3). We'll be able to do what we have always wanted to do, with no restraints. We can totally serve God the way we long to!

We will have **worship**—the main activity in heaven: "... *The tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people ...*" (Revelation 21:3). The redeemed will follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4). We will experience the completion of our worship. In fact, our entire service for Him will be one of worship!

All of these possessions will be joyously treasured as we live together in the Celestial City—a place of unbelievable, shining, brilliant beauty (Revelation 21:10–21)!

What will not be in heaven? To begin with, there will be no time in the sense of yesterday, tomorrow, early, or late. But in Revelation 22:2, there seems to be an allusion to time: *each tree yielding its fruit every month*. And now comes a great part! Look at all that God will be doing for us! There will be: no seas (21:1); no tears (21:4); no death (21:4); no crying (21:4); no pain (21:4); no temple or church building (21:22); no sun, moon, or night (21:23); no sin, unbelievers, or evil forces (21:27); no sickness (22:2); and no curse (22:3). Hallelujah! Praise God!

WEDNESDAY: Heaven Will Fulfill Us Forever

... I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Psalm 23:6b, emphasis added).

God says that we ... *shall reign forever and ever ...* (Revelation 22:5). How long will we be in heaven? Forever—all because of faith in the Lamb who sacrificed Himself for us (Revelation 7:4; 22:14)!

In Revelation 21:1–8 we discover the husbandly love of Jesus unveiling paradise for His bride. Picture it: standing on the hill, with the rising sun, Jesus says, "Here it is, My beloved!" Let us look to the fair land of our pilgrimage and see that city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God! And in the wonders that we shall behold, let us see *Him* who has made it our home-to-be, for the Lamb is the glory of Emmanuel's land. God *Himself* should be our greatest desire for reaching heaven!

The founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, A. B. Simpson wrote:

Himself

*Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word;
Once His gifts I wanted, now the giver owns;
Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone.*

*Once 'twas painful trying, now 'tis perfect trust;
Once a half salvation, now the uttermost;
Once 'twas ceaseless holding, now He holds me fast;
Once 'twas constant drifting, now my anchor's cast.*

*Once 'twas busy planning, now 'tis trustful prayers,
Once 'twas anxious caring, now He has the care;
Once 'twas what I wanted, now what Jesus says;
Once 'twas constant asking, now 'tis ceaseless praise.*

*Once it was my working, His it hence shall be,
Once I tried to use Him, now He uses me;
Once the power I wanted, now the Mighty One;
Once for self I labored, now for Him alone....*

—A. B. Simpson

Modern advertisements mesmerize us into thinking we are to be amused, comforted, and secure in this world. But God says that true satisfaction and fulfillment can only be obtained through *Him*!

THURSDAY: The Best Part of Heaven

*“... I will come again and receive you to Myself; **that where I am, there you may be also**” (John 14:3, emphasis added).*

Although I can't wait to see the gates made of pearl, the precious stones of heaven, and the city's numerous other glories, that is not what I am looking forward to most. I can't wait to see Christ face-to-face! *Jesus* is the best part of heaven!

The Seven Perfections of Jesus: The subject of heaven is often spoken of as “the sweet by and by,” and images of harps, clouds, angel wings, and a seemingly ethereal world of misty spirit form in the mind. But, in reality, heaven is a glorious place of wonder and beauty. Of all its indescrib-

able beauties and unending glories, there is, above all else, Jesus, who is the most beautiful aspect of heaven. And there are seven wonderful facets of the love of Jesus for all the saints, His bride.

Facet 1—Jesus will be with us: “... *God Himself will be with them and be their God*” (Revelation 21:3). First, there will be the unbroken presence of Emmanuel, *God with us*. Secondly, there will be the fulfillment of all that He has promised. The Bible contains all the promises of God, but one day we will get to experience the person behind the promises.

Facet 2—Jesus will comfort us: ... “*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying ... no more pain ...*” (Revelation 21:4). Even though we know that Jesus and His promises are with us, this present life is hard. However, the sadness of current disappointments will end with the security of divine appointment; the dread of death will end with the Lord of Life; the frailties of the flesh will end when entering our heavenly habitation. The future, like the past, is kept securely by Him with whom our anchor is cast.

Facet 3—Jesus will refresh us: ... “*I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts*” (Revelation 21:6). A life of dryness will be gone; the refreshing spring of life will be ever with us. Although He can comfort and be with us in this present life, heaven is the ultimate comfort: “*He who believes in Me ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:38). This is an endless supply, for He within us shall be that fountain.

Facet 4—Jesus will captivate us: ... *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple* (21:22). This is the culmination of all the types from which they were fashioned: the true One showing facets of His image by His holiness, His character, and His redemption. We are to not make images of Him, but we are to see Him through the types of the tabernacle and the temple. Which satisfies you most—the picture or the person? The figures have been there for time, but the fullness will be for all eternity. Worship will be unbounded by location or proximity; it will be unending and all-present because our worship will be focused on Him as He captivates us.

Facet 5—Jesus will keep us secure: *And nothing unclean ... shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life* (21:27 NAS). The wonder of heaven is that He will keep us secure, just as He has here on earth. There will now be an exclusion of all evil forever. At last, our freedom will be completed! At Calvary, we were freed from both the penalty and power of sin; at the Celestial City we will forever be removed from the presence of sin. All the washed ones, those washed in the Lamb's blood and written in the Lamb's Book of Life, will be welcomed there.

Facet 6—Jesus will lead us: ... *the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him...* (22:3 NAS). He is the Master; we are the servants who will follow Him. The return of Christ's rule as King of the kingdom will be unhindered—and He wants complete dedication, not mere compliments. He never simply said, “Accept Me!” Rather, He declared: “Leave all and follow Me, or you can't be My disciple.” Jesus wants glad and unhindered service forever. After the complete destruction of the curse's doom, we will no longer struggle with the weeds of sin so that we can fully follow the Lamb's wishes.

Facet 7—Jesus will light us: *There shall be no night there: ...for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever ...* (Revelation 22:5). The source of light in the new heaven will be the Savior, the Lamb, who is the Light. And in that glow we shall walk in unbroken communion. The denial of dark deeds will be consigned to the blackness of darkness forever, but we shall rule by submission to Him forever. The despair of darkness will be ended; there will be no more unfinished plans, for He is the completion of all. This is the fulfillment of Christ's first coming: "... *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).

FRIDAY: Three Worms That Spoil the Fruit

"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are ... blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments ... that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" (Revelation 3:17–18, emphasis added).

Jesus promised that He would get all His children home safely, and we will live with Him forever. Although that is exciting news, what we often forget is the need to be sending treasures on ahead, because there are only prepaid treasures in heaven. Our mission on earth therefore is to be transmuting earthly treasures into heavenly currency.

When we take that final trip with Jesus—through the valley of the shadow of death or in the skies through the clouds at the voice of the archangel and the trump of God—no baggage left here can accompany us. Only what we have sent on ahead will make it to heaven. Transmuted wealth is all that will be worth anything in heaven.

Pastor Jan Hettinga wrote a book on this subject that is so good I just have to share a portion of it with you. Except for the Bible, Hettinga's *Follow Me* is one of the few books I've read more than once. What struck me most when I read it is this: there are three terrible dangers that can rob anyone of finishing well and earning Christ's "Well done!" Afterward, I thought: *Wow! I don't want to be robbed of Christ's "Well done—good and faithful servant!"*

Here are the three dangers that should concern all who seek Christ's full rewards in heaven:²

Danger 1—Beware of the sins of old age. These sins (which can occur at any age) can erase Christ's "Well done!" Remember Solomon: he began by sacrificing thousands of animals and building the most beautiful worship place for the Lord, but he failed to finish well. He got to heaven *yet so as by fire*. (In today's language, we'd say that Solomon got into heaven "by the skin of his teeth.") What are these sins of old age?

The Lust for Comfort and Convenience: This sin is epidemic. We continually lust for comfort. People read magazines on how to make their home or car even more comfortable. We are guilty of lust, which is to have a strong desire for comfort and convenience. Do you know how I know that occurs even in the church? Every time it rains or snows heavily, attendance

is down. And excuses like this are common: “It’s just too inconvenient in bad weather to load everybody into the car, slosh through puddles and mud in the parking lot, and then have to deal with all the wet coats once we get into the building.” A life consumed with a lust for comfort and convenience like that won’t finish well.

Greed for Recognition: Older people usually want to receive recognition of some sort. In fact, it seems that almost everyone lusts for the applause of others. We must beware of seeking approval from people and instead seek approval only from God.

Covetousness for Security: Our whole country has become security-obsessed. People want to know how to best secure retirement funds, how to secure college education funds, how to get job security, and how to secure their homes and other possessions. We are caught up in the pursuit of security, and are wasting valuable time and energy to protect things we cannot keep.

These sins of old age—the lust for comfort, greed for recognition, and covetousness for security—can erase Christ’s “Well done!”

Danger 2—Beware of the problem of exceptionism. What is exceptionism? It is thinking that your life is an exception to God’s Word. Thus you excuse yourself from doing anything for heaven because of things like your past, pain, poverty, or poor self-image. The reason exceptionism can erase Christ’s “Well done!” is because when we hear an exhortation to “Go into all the world, speak to every creature, and live your life looking for Christ”—many excuse themselves saying, “Oh, I can’t do that just now. At this time in my life I can’t spare a minute—not even for reading the Word, ministering, praying, or evangelizing.”

Think carefully on this: *you will never be in the future what you are not becoming today*. If you are not responding to and obeying God’s Word now, and you feel like you’re always an exception, that attitude will stay with you till the end. Consider Annanias and Sapphira, who thought they were exceptions to the rule. Since everybody else was sacrificing, and they felt that they couldn’t, they decided to at least *look* like they did. That bad decision not only cost them their lives but also erased Christ’s “Well done!”

Danger 3—Beware of unmortified pockets of pride. “Unmortified pockets of pride” sounds like abscesses in the body, but that is really what he is talking about. Allowing such pockets of pride to grow can make you secretly, inwardly proud of your intellect (thinking you are smarter than others), or proud of your achievements, or proud of your giftedness (even in the church), or proud of your goodness (“I’m not as bad as they are”). Sin, in the light of sin, never does look bad, but sin in the light of God’s holiness always looks bad. Pockets of pride in your life can erase Christ’s “Well done!” The cure is to allow the power of God’s Word through the Holy Spirit to deal with even the slightest prideful “abscess” at the moment it begins to erupt.

To avoid these dangers and to help you get ready for Christ’s “Well done!” in heaven, you must listen carefully to what Jesus has to say about what He expects when He comes back for us. What does He want to see cultivated in our lives? I have located twelve expectations, and we will go over them in tomorrow’s devotional.

SATURDAY: Will You Hear Christ's "Well Done"?

"... '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).

Don't you long to hear Christ say, "Well done, My good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master's home!"? A "Well done!" from Him will make this life on earth all worthwhile. What does God expect from us so that we can faithfully earn His "Well done!"?

Expectation 1—Dream about winning the ultimate prize. (See Matthew 25:14–30.) When people have something on their minds, it shapes the whole direction of their lives. Jesus has told us that when He returns for us He expects to find us doing what He asked us to do. Keeping that utmost in your mind is a strong motivator. It will shape your life if you dream about winning the ultimate prize—Christ's "Well done!" You must want it and long for it. In fact, that is one of the marks of salvation.

Expectation 2—Seek to be the greatest Christlike servant. (See Matthew 20:28–30.) Imitation is one of the highest forms of compliments. The apostle Paul said, *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ* (1 Corinthians 11:1). Is your life worth imitating? Do you reflect your Lord in all that you do?

William Barclay has succinctly commented: "'Out in the world,' said Jesus, 'it is quite true that the great man is the man who controls others; the man to whose word of command others must leap; the man who with a wave of his hand can have his slightest need supplied. Out in the world there was the Roman governor with his retinue and the eastern potentate with his slaves. The world counts them great. But among my followers service alone is the badge of greatness. Greatness does not consist in commanding others to do things for you; it consists in doing things for others; and the greater the service, the greater the honor.' Jesus uses a kind of gradation. 'If you wish to be great,' he says, 'be a servant; if you wish to be first of all, be a slave.' Here is the Christian revolution; here is the complete reversal of all the world's standards. A complete new set of values has been brought into life." (Emphasis added.)³

Those who are most Christlike in their servanthood are the greatest in His kingdom and will hear His "Well done!"

Expectation 3—Love to sacrifice for Him through financial generosity. (See Luke 21:1–4.) Jesus said that "*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:21). The key to sacrifice is to do it now. Don't wait. Be sure that while you do have something and can sacrifice, do it! Some day, every dollar, every piece of gold, and every jewel will be devalued, wiped out forever (see 2 Peter 3:10).

You are sending ahead either *wood, hay, and stubble or gold, silver, and precious stones* for building your mansion. What are you sending? Those who are financially generous for Christ will reap an everlasting treasure that Jesus says will never be lost.

Expectation 4—Love trials by joyfully accepting injustice. (See Matthew 5:11–12.) When you are mistreated for Christ's sake, and accept it graciously *because of conscience toward God*, Jesus says that you will be rewarded in heaven with His "Well done!"

Expectation 5—Love strangers through biblical hospitality. (See Matthew 10:40–41; 18:27; 25:40–45.) There is a wonderful insight from an outsider named Aristeides who looked at the early church. He wrote this note to the Roman Emperor in A.D. 155: "Now the Christians, O King ... if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food. For Christ's sake they are ready to lay down their lives." How does that spirit line up with your own life? If you minister Christ's love to those in need, you will hear His "Well done!"

Expectation 6—Restrain your flesh by seeking spiritual disciplines. (See Matthew 6:5.) In his book *Intimacy with the Almighty*, Charles Swindoll writes: "We have reared a generation of strong-willed, belligerent, independent young men and women. Surrender is not a word in their vocabulary. Too bad since it is the key that unlocks the vault of God's best and deepest treasures. He patiently waits for us to yield, to quit fighting Him, to allow His plan to run its course, to turn to Him for our security and significance. As He witnesses our doing that, He begins to reveal Himself and His will in greater depth."⁴

Swindoll also sets forth the need to cultivate these spiritual disciplines: "The decision to reorder one's private world is the spiritual discipline of simplicity. The decision to be still is the spiritual discipline of silence. The decision to cultivate serenity is the spiritual discipline of solitude. The decision to trust the Lord completely is the spiritual discipline of surrender."⁵ Pursuing these spiritual disciplines will earn Christ's "Well done!"

Expectation 7—Love your lot in life through vocational faithfulness. (See Colossians 3:22–24; Philippians 2:8–9; 1 Peter 5:6.) You should serve your masters (authorities) in the same manner that you serve Christ, for God has promised that if you humble yourself under His mighty hand that He will exalt you in due time. Being faithful in your vocation or service for His sake will earn His "Well done!"

Expectation 8—Love the hard to love. (See Luke 6:27–28.) When others have revealed themselves to be enemies, Jesus expects you to do good to them, and to bless rather than curse them—for His sake. Loving the hard to love will earn Christ's "Well done!"

Expectation 9—Love God's Truth. (See 2 John 1–2, 4, 8; Colossians 3:16.) Jesus wants you to love His Word so much that you are literally filled to overflowing with it! Living the Word-filled life will earn Christ's "Well done!"

Expectation 10—Love to take people to heaven with you. (See 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 1 Corinthians 3:6–8.) Paul says that your hope, joy, and crown of rejoicing should be to see others to whom you've witnessed in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming. Loving to be a soul winner will earn Christ's "Well done!"

Expectation 11—Love Jesus' return. (See Luke 12:35–38; 2 Timothy 4:8.) God says that you are a blessed servant if you faithfully watch for His return! In fact, He will give you the crown of righteousness if you love His appearing. This spirit will earn Christ's "Well done!"

Expectation 12—Love Jesus' refinement of you through trials. (See 1 Peter 1:7; Hebrews 6:10.) God is greatly pleased when He sees you loving Jesus so much that when He leads you through further refinement, you view it as a blessing. He will not forget your work and labor of love, for you will hear His "Well done!"

Make a choice to live in hope. Are you dreaming about winning the ultimate prize? Are you Christlike? Are you investing in heaven now? Are you suffering joyfully for Him? Are you welcoming strangers? Are you saying no to sin? Are you living contentedly? Are you loving others with Christ's love? Do you love God's Word? Are you taking others to heaven with you? Are you waiting and watching for Christ's return? Are you letting Him prune you?

If your heart's longing is to be able to positively affirm each of these questions, even though you can't do so perfectly, then you are choosing to live in hope—and you will taste of the joys of heaven and discover the ecstasies of honeymooning with Jesus!

May this song be symbolic of the deepest desire for your life here on earth!

I'd Rather Have Jesus

*I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold;
I'd rather be His than have riches untold:
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands.
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.*

*I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause;
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame.
I'd rather be true to His holy name.*

*He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom;
He's sweeter than honey from out the comb;
He's all that my hungering spirit needs.
I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead.*

Refrain:

*Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway.
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.*

—Rhea F. Miller, 1922

Week 48—Behold the Wonders of Jesus

(Revelation 21:9–27)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you behold the wonders of Jesus!



SUNDAY: The First and the Last Books

... 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).

Graham Scroggie wrote this wonderful exposition of why the early Christians studied the book of Revelation, and why we should do the same today: “Not without reason did the early Church study this Book. Practically the whole of it is reproducible from the Christian writers of the first three centuries and it is probably true that this cannot be said of any other New Testament Writing. As no other Book, the Revelation stands in certain relations to all other parts of the Bible, a fact that gives the seal of finality to it. Take two illustrations only. It is interesting that those who were closest to Christ spoke most often from this Book.

“The Book of the Revelation completes the whole Bible. In Genesis is the Foundation of God’s redeeming purpose; in Exodus to Jude, the Superstructure of it; and in Revelation, the Completion of it.

“The Old Testament is about the Kingdom; the Gospels are about the Messiah; the Epistles are about the Church; and the Revelation is about them all—completed.

“Revelation completes the Book of Genesis. The first and last Books of the Bible present most striking comparisons and contrasts. By way of comparison: In Genesis are the First Heaven and Earth, and in Revelation, the Last. In Genesis is the First Rest, and in Revelation, the Final Rest. In Genesis Paradise is Lost, and in Revelation it is Regained. In Genesis God makes Husband and Wife, and in Revelation, the Lamb and the Bride.

"But the contrasts between these two Books are even more striking: In the first, Satan is victorious; in the last, he is defeated.

"In the first, judgment is pronounced; and in the last it is executed.

"In the first, the divine face is hidden; and in the last, we see His face forever more. In the first, the gates are shut against us; and in the last, they are never shut.

"In the first, Adam and Eve were banished from the Tree of Life; and in the last, we have a right to it.

"In the first, we were exiles from the earthly Garden; and in the last, we are inheritors of the heavenly City."¹

It is truly sin that made the earth bad.² Before the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, there could be no death, disease, famine, war, natural catastrophe, cancer, weakness, rust, pollution, hatred, murder, rape, lying, corrupt government, wife beating, child molesting, greed, and a thousand other ills that have plagued man for six thousand years of history. Every broken body, every disturbed mind, every hurting heart—the collective tears of the human race—can trace their origin back to the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As a consequence of sin, man has polluted the ocean, raped the earth, and poisoned the heavens—the very sphere which God committed to man's authority. Is there any wonder, then, that the present heaven and earth must be dissolved—purged by fire to loose it from the consequences of sin—to make way for a new heaven and earth?

In the new heaven and earth there will be no more twisted wrecks of car and plane accidents; no more lifeless forms that have been shocked, poisoned, drowned, or suffocated; no more crippled bodies; no more torturous therapy and throbbing pain; no more arthritis, insomnia, and bodily dysfunction; no more merciless onslaught of age and its accompanying aches and disintegration.

In heaven we see the wonders of Jesus. In Revelation 21:9–27 we find the wonders of Jesus. I hope you are rejoicing in all that your heavenly Father has in store for you!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Oh, Father in heaven, why You would let Your Son redeem us, and then go and prepare a place for us, is beyond our wildest imaginations! As we look into Your Word, we pray that Your Spirit would lead us to comprehend the wonders of our Lord Jesus who has prepared this place in which every part radiates Your glory. May we see Your glory, and may Your glory, as the apostle Paul says, transform us more and more into the image of Him whom our souls love. Open our eyes, and let us behold magnificent things from the wonders of Jesus. In His precious name we come to You, oh Father. Amen.*

MONDAY: New Things in the New Heaven and Earth

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea (Revelation 21:1, emphasis added).

Over the next few days we will be looking at seven new things in the new heaven and the new earth.

The first new thing is the new heaven (21:1): *A new heaven and a new earth* does not necessitate the annihilation of the present heaven. However, it will be at least a thorough and basic transformation (2 Peter 3:10-13). As you know, the law of the conservation of matter, which God built into this universe, means that matter is never created or destroyed in the world that we know; it is only transferred back and forth. It is very possible that God just transfers the matter of this universe to energy and, in a creative act, puts it back like it was. All of that is necessary because there can't be even a trace of sin remaining.

The second new thing is the new earth (21:1): The earth will not be written off as a corrected failure of God's rule, but as an eternal triumph of His rule. There will be sweeping transformations on earth as well as in heaven, for there will be *no more sea* in the new earth.

The third new thing is the new peoples (21:3-4). Israel will certainly be one of them (Isaiah 66:22). But all the peoples on the new earth will be God's people (v. 3). Death, sorrow, crying, and pain will be unknown (v. 4). Righteousness will be its great characteristic (2 Peter 3:13).

The fourth new thing is the New Jerusalem (21:9-22:7). This is either a literal city (according to authors Seiss, Newell, Gaebelein, Pentecost); a symbolical city (Scott); or it is both literal and symbolical. It seems to be suspended over the planet Earth during the Millennium (v. 10). What do I mean by "seems to be"? 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 be very forbearing of 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. With that said, it therefore seems to me that this heavenly Jerusalem will be suspended out in space during the Millennium because we will be with Christ, and the millennial saints can still see us. However, we will get to come down to the earth even though we won't actually live here any more—working, marrying, and giving in marriage. We will be celestial, yet still be able to come and go from heaven, the New Jerusalem.

In verse 16, the New Jerusalem appears to be in the shape of a cube (Seiss, Newell, Gaebelein, Pentecost); however, Ironside views it as a pyramid, with the reminder that the shape of the most holy place in both the tabernacle and the temple was a cube. Because there is always a trinity in everything God does, the city will have three dimensions: length, breadth, and height. From the description God gives, I think it will be a beautiful crystal cube.

The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem—the resurrected and glorified New Testament church who sought the coming city (Hebrews 13:14)—are clearly indicated as being there with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (v. 22). The names of the twelve apostles will be on the foundations of the city (21:14). The resurrected and glorified Old Testament saints will also be there because they likewise looked forward to this heavenly dwelling place. Thus, God is preparing a city for them (Hebrews 11:16), and on the city's twelve gates will be the names of the twelve

tribes of Israel (21:12). This is an amazing correlation: the new people of God will be identified with the city's foundations, and the old people of God will be identified with its gates.

There is a lot of speculation on the height of the walls and the size of the gates. If you read Revelation 21 without trying to make it like something on earth, it appears that the walls will be as high as the city. The only measurement given is 144 cubits, which is 216 feet (probably the thickness of the wall), and it most likely reaches to the top. Why would we need any walls at all? I don't really know, but God will put them there, and He says they look like jasper. To us, jasper is a reddish stone. However, jasper is also the word used for diamonds in Scripture. It could be that the outer wall will glisten like a polished diamond, with its light emanating inside-out through the walls. If after visiting some distant place you were to come to heaven to see God's glory, you would see something like the largest diamond in the universe spraying light out in every direction. Nothing that defiles can ever enter (v. 27), and its amazing splendor will be absolutely astonishing (vv. 18–21)!

Will anything that defiles still exist? Yes, the last few verses of Isaiah tell us that we will be able to look down, off in the distance, and see the horrors of hell. In the biblical sense, hell never ends just as heaven never ends. We will therefore be aware of God's wrath, but those in hell will never be able to leave.

TUESDAY: The Pearly Gates of Heaven

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: ... The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:12, 21, emphasis added).

In Revelation 21:12–21 we notice the twelve gates, each a single pearl. Since God designs twelve gates to enter His city, the focus of today's devotional will be the wonderful ways that God's Word has offered us entrance into His fellowship and partaking in ministry for Him. As we look at heaven consider these things.

Our occupation will be the worship of God: *Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard ... the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"* (Revelation 19:5–6; see also Revelation 4:5 and 1 Kings 8:27). If we want to prepare well for our final destination, we should faithfully worship God here on earth. Our arrival in heaven will only be a continuation of what we have already begun. Praise is both the language of heaven and the language of the faithful on earth. Thus, we will be occupied with worshipful service to the Lord (Revelation 22:3–4; Matthew 4:10; Luke 2:37; Acts 24:14).

Our family will be all our brothers and sisters in Christ: *"... Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother"* (Mark 3:35). Jesus said that if we love Him, we

will keep His commandments (John 14:15). All those who have kept His commandments, just as He kept the Father's, will abide in His love (John 15:10) and get to live together with Him forever!

Our faith that saves will be an assurance of truth: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is a conviction, a sense of assurance or confidence that something is true. If we are convinced of the truth of Scripture, we will be saved (1 John 5:9–13).

This faith is directed to Christ alone (Romans 10:9–10). If you are persuaded that Christ did all that is necessary, and all that ever will be necessary to bring you to God, you not only will be saved but also will know it (1 Timothy 1:12; Romans 10:17). This faith is confirmed by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16–17). This faith bears spiritual fruit (Ephesians 2:10). This faith grows (Ephesians 4:11–16).³

Revelation 21:21 tells us that *the twelve gates were twelve pearls* The **pearls** represent **the doors to rewards** gained by pursuing what Christ is looking for in His beloved children—His expectations of us. Listed below is a summary of His twelve expectations (one for each gate) that were covered on Saturday of Week 47:

- Love the ultimate prize—seek Christ's "Well done!"
- Love service—seek to be the greatest servant.
- Love sacrifice—give generously.
- Love trials—joyfully accept injustice.
- Love strangers—show biblical hospitality.
- Love to restrain your flesh—seek the spiritual disciplines.
- Love your lot in life—be faithful in your vocation.
- Love the unlovable—model Christlikeness.
- Love God's Truth—pursue doctrinal integrity.
- Love ministry—take people to heaven with you.
- Love Jesus—watch for Christ's return.
- Love refinement—accept suffering.⁴

Upon hearing of the assassination of John and Betty Stam in China in 1934, Will Houghton, former president of Moody Bible Institute, wrote these words: "So this is life. This world with its pleasures, struggles and tears, a smile, a frown, a sigh, friendship so true and love of kin and neighbor? Sometimes it is hard to live—always to die! The world moves on so rapidly for the living; the forms of those who disappear are replaced, and each one dreams that he will be enduring. How soon that one becomes the missing face! Help me to know the value of these hours. Help me the folly of all waste to see. Help me to trust the Christ who bore my sorrows and thus to yield for life or death to Thee."⁵

WEDNESDAY: The New Temple of Worship

“... true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24, emphasis added).

In Monday’s devotional, we learned about four of the seven new things that will be in the new heaven and earth. Today and tomorrow, we will cover the remaining three.

The fifth new thing is the new temple (21:22): *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.* The entire universe will become a place of worship! God will be the focus of everything; He will no longer be detached from His children any more. Heaven will be full of new worship—we are going to be totally enraptured in worshiping God! Revelation 21 mentions seven new ways that we will worship Jesus.

First New Way to Worship—Jesus the Lamb as our Beloved: *Then one of the seven angels ... came to me ... saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife”* (Revelation 21:9). These angels are mentioned the first time in Revelation 16, where each of the first six bowls are described. This is now the seventh, and the last time, they appear. It seems that these seven angels that surround God’s throne each unleash a bowl of His wrath during the Tribulation.

The emphasis is that we will be worshiping Jesus the Lamb as our beloved One. That is what Rutherford wrote in “Emmanuel’s Land”: *The Bride eyes not her garment but her dear bride-groom’s face. I will not gaze at glory but on my King of grace. Not at the crown he giveth but on the Lord Jesus Christ who is the glory of Emmanuel’s land.*⁶

That is what we will do—worship Jesus because He is our beloved husband. It is not the splendors of the city that will captivate us. God doesn’t want us to get caught up in the glory of His riches. He wants us to focus on Jesus, His Son, and worship the Lamb as our beloved.

Second New Way to Worship—Jesus the Lamb as our Foundation: *Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb* (Revelation 21:14). Our hope for all eternity rests in Jesus the Lamb, and we will worship Him as our foundation upon whom we as His church have been built, as Peter says in 1 Peter 2:4.

Third New Way to Worship—Jesus the Lamb as our Temple: *But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple* (Revelation 21:22). He will be the focus of our worship. Why am I emphasizing all this? After all, we are not in heaven yet. The scriptural principle is this: anything that God is going to like in the future, He likes right now; anything that God is going to do in the future, He would appreciate it if we would get in step with it right now. That is why it is so interesting to read what God does in the future. He wants us to honor Him now to prepare us to later worship Jesus the Lamb as our temple.

Fourth New Way to Worship—Jesus the Lamb as our Light: *The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light* (Revelation 21:23). He is the One who provides all the light we will ever need. In fact, when the apostle Paul gave his testimony he said, “This is salvation to open our eyes and to turn us from darkness to

light" (see Acts 26:18). Jesus was promised to us in Luke 1:78b-79a, which says, "*the Dayspring from on high has visited us ... who sit in darkness.*" He is our light, and we will worship Him in heaven as our light. Therefore, the city will have no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it. It doesn't mean there aren't going to be stars or moons, because there will be. We just won't *need* them anymore—the glory of God, the Lamb, illuminates the city. So in heaven, this new worship is that we worship Jesus the Lamb as our light. What a wonder that will be!

Fifth New Way to Worship—Jesus the Lamb as our Guardian: ... *There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, ... but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life* (Revelation 21:27). We will worship Him who guarded, secured, and kept us. The Lamb is our guardian; He is the One who writes in the Lamb's Book of Life; He is the One who keeps all who come to Him from falling, and will present them faultless before His presence. We will therefore worship Jesus the Lamb as our security, our eternal guardian.

Sixth New Way to Worship—Jesus the Lamb as our Spring of Life: *And he showed me a pure river of water of life ... proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb* (Revelation 22:1). It is interesting that there will no longer be any seas or oceans, but there is going to be a springing up of the water of life. Why won't there be any oceans? Probably the same reason there isn't any blood in heaven. Jesus has said that flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. After His resurrection body, Jesus stated that He had a body and bones, but He did not mention anything about blood (Luke 24:39). Why? Blood has to do with corruption; it is the disinfecting system; it is actually the garbage system of our body. Blood takes out all the dead cells and poisons and filters them out of our bodies.

Do you know how the oceans function on our planet? They act as a giant cleaning system. Rains catch all the impurities and put them into the rivers and streams to run them out into the ocean. After that, only pure water is evaporated, like distilled water, which then goes up into the clouds, comes back down, cleans the air and the ground, and then flushes everything right back into the septic tank of the planet—the oceans.

Just as God doesn't need oceans, we won't need blood. There won't be any waste by-products (we can't conceive of this because we are in a fallen universe). The Lamb Himself will be our spring of life. The *water of life* no longer carries trash out because it proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The millennial temple will have water coming out from underneath the altar, which is a symbol of God's throne. But here, when the temple is done away with, the water will flow out from underneath the throne. No longer will we need to have the altar as a symbol, because we will be gathered around God's throne itself. And the Water of Life flowing from under His throne is symbolic of true endless life flowing from God. We will thus worship Jesus the Lamb as our spring of life!

Seventh New Way to Worship—Jesus the Lamb as our King: *And there shall be no more curse ... and His servants shall serve Him* (Revelation 22:3). Remember: in Genesis, God cursed the earth and the universe because of the transgression of Adam as he followed Eve in her transgression. But here it says there will be no more curse—God removes and destroys it—the curse is annihilated. Jesus is our King whom we worship by serving. And that makes me want to burst

forth singing: *King of my life I crown Thee now; Thine shall the glory be!*⁷ It is no wonder then that we worship Jesus the Lamb as our King!

THURSDAY: The New Paradise of God

And he showed me a pure river of water of life ... proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits ... every month. The leaves ... were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 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 22:1–5).

The sixth new thing is the new paradise (22:1–5). We will be living in the new paradise, the beautiful garden of God! What a thrill to see again the tree of life, a river of the water of life! And, most of all, that which makes heaven to be heaven: unhindered access to God. We will experience Emmanuel *at last*—God with us and we with God!

The seventh new thing is the new Light (21:23): *The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.* The garden of God will be lit with a different kind of light. This is hard for us to understand because we can't conceive of life apart from the sun.

The ancients used to worship the sun because it sustains all life. Most fossil fuels are a product of sunlight being captured through the wonders of photosynthesis and converted into energy stored in plants and trees. Most fossil fuels are compressed and decomposed plants and trees. Here we see that we no longer will be dependent on the sun for the heat, light, and energy it gives because the glory of God lights the city. The Lamb becomes the lamp of the city; His light will illuminate the nations of the earth and day will be supreme. There will be no more darkness, and in the absence of darkness there will be no more fear, death, or evil associated with it.

In James 1:17 we are told that *with [God] there is no variation or shadow of turning*. Those are two astronomical terms meaning that there is no eclipsing of God. In other words, nothing will come between Him to cut off His light as an eclipse does on the earth. With God there will be no eclipsing—no variations as when the stars pulsate. Individual stars differ in their light and electromagnetic radiation output, but no longer will we have such variation. There will be no burning out, and no eclipsing. Thus, we will worship Him who is the Light, and who has lighted our souls forever by His truth.

This focus on worshiping the new Light reminds me of this splendid old song by Phillip Bliss. Note that whether we are on earth or in heaven—the Light of the world is Jesus.

The Light of the World Is Jesus

*The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin—
The light of the world is Jesus;
Like sunshine at noon-day His glory shone in—
The Light of the world is Jesus.*

*No darkness have we who in Jesus abide—
The Light of the world is Jesus:
We walk in the Light when we follow our Guide—
The Light of the world is Jesus.*

*No need of the sunlight in heaven, we're told—
The Light of the world is Jesus;
The Lamb is the Light in the City of gold—
The Light of the world is Jesus.*

*Come to the Light, 'tis shining for thee!
Sweetly the Light has dawned upon me;
Once I was blind, but now I can see—
The Light of the world is Jesus.*

—*Philip P. Bliss*

FRIDAY: The Perfections of the New Heaven

... “Behold, I make all things new ...” (Revelation 21:5, emphasis added).

What other priceless lessons can we learn from Revelation 21? Now that we've seen seven new things in heaven, and seven new ways we will joyously worship the Lamb of God, let us look at ten perfections of the new heaven.

Perfection One—Fellowship: ... *and there was no more sea* (Revelation 21:1 KJV). Vanquished are the depths of the seas that often gave storms and caused separations! The idea of no more seas may take us back to the idea of never being separated by the distance of a sea from those we love, and thus pointing to God as ever near.

Perfection Two—Consolation: *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ...* (Revelation 21:4 KJV). The Comforter will give everlasting comfort for any tears over our own failures, the hurts caused by others, and the sorrow over the loss and hurt of loved ones. All the ravages of sin will be gone forever.

Perfection Three—Living: ... *and there shall be no more death ...* (Revelation 21:4 KJV). Never again will we have to watch the life drain from a beloved spouse, parent, or friend. There will be no more death vigils in Intensive Care Units and waiting rooms. The prince of terrors will be gone and the Prince of Peace will reign.

Perfection Four—Joy: ... *and there shall be no more ... sorrow, nor crying ...* (Revelation 21:4 KJV). Yes, Christians feel sorrow and they cry when parents pass away. They grieve the loss of a marriage partner who goes ahead of them to the presence of Christ. The depth of such losses is fully experienced, but Jesus has promised that we will have abundant life (John 10:10)—and in this world we have only tasted of the Spirit's fruit called joy. But oh, the joy of our future reunion!

Perfection Five—Health: ... *and there shall be no more ... pain ...* (Revelation 21:4 KJV). There will be no more colds, flu bugs, arthritis, painfully incapacitating diseases, or any other physical ailments!

Perfection Six—Sustenance and Resources: ... *I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely* (Revelation 21:6 KJV). For the millions who have agonized in hunger and thirst on earth, that will be no more. Gone will be the pressures of securing daily provisions because the provider will have come (Revelation 7:16). Jesus came that we might never hunger nor thirst (John 6:35)!

Perfection Seven—Worship: ... *the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it* (Revelation 21:22 KJV). The mere representation or symbols of God will be replaced by the immediate and actual presence of God. There will be no more cold hearts and fainting prayers; no more wandering minds in song, study, and prayer. The personal God who promised to be with us will be there. And we will forever be with Him who loved us and sent His Son to give Himself for us! That is why we will break into worship and song so often in Revelation. It will be absolutely perfect there!

Perfection Eight—Illumination: ... *the Lamb is the light thereof* (Revelation 21:23 KJV). No more brownouts, blackouts, power surges, or power failures. No more gloomy days. No more dark days. The Light of the World has come, and we will at last walk in the light as He is in the Light!

Perfection Nine—Security: *And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day ...* (Revelation 21:25 KJV). All the fears and phobias of the old world are gone. The dangers of robber and stalker are past. The constant awareness of imminent loss is gone. The need to protect ourselves from intruders and assailants has passed with the arrival of our protector and fortress. We will be under the wings of the One we can wholly trust: no more fear of defilement or pollution; no need to purify air, water, and food; no screens, locks, combinations, doors, or guns. We will be free at last!

Perfection Ten—Refreshment: ... *there shall be no night there* (Revelation 21:25 KJV). There will be no end to activity; no exhaustion; no place for evil men and their evil plans (John 3:19). All that will be is the enjoyment of a day that knows no end. At last we'll have glorious bodies fashioned like our Savior's (Philippians 3:21). Oh, that will be glory for me! How about you?

SATURDAY: The Wonder of Entering Heaven

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15, emphasis added).

When your appointment with death arrives, the Lord Jesus Himself will wondrously take you by the hand and usher you instantly into heaven. At the moment you are absent from the body you will forever be in His presence! Jesus Christ, who has guided you through the valley of the shadow of death, will continue to guide you as He takes you by the hand and leads you up past the marshaled ranks of the angels!

The Scriptures talk about what God's throne looks like. It is raised up, and sits in the sides of the north; in front of it is a glassy sea; surrounding it in concentric circles are the angels. When Daniel saw them, he said there were myriads of myriads—ten thousands of ten thousands. What does “ten thousand times ten thousand” equal? Hundreds of millions of standing angelic beings! How powerful are angels? Just one angel slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night! They are very powerful—and hundreds of millions of these super powerful angelic creations stand by God's throne.

So then, you will walk by the marshaled hosts, the ranks of the angels, up through the golden boulevards of glory, up past the cherubim. When you get closer to God's throne, you will see creatures with four faces and six wings surrounding His throne. Hovering, they constantly say, *“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord.”* The seraphim, which means *“burning ones,”* join them. So these burning, holy creatures are speaking about God. Finally, Christ will lead you up to the throne of God Himself.

What happens next? Having passed from this life, which is physical, into real life, which is supernatural and spiritual, Jesus will then hold your hand and walk you up past all the angels, cherubim, and seraphim to the very throne of God. Jesus will then confess your name before His Father and the angels (Revelation 3:5). He will introduce you saying, “Father, I would like You to meet one for whom I died—one whom I bring to You as My beloved, as one whom I purchased. I now present My child to You ...” Then you will hear Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, actually say *your* name! Talk about the most unbelievable moment of your existence!

Do you remember how you will be clothed? In a white robe! If you will recall, when Jesus was transfigured, He pulled back the veil of His flesh to let us see what He's really like as God in His eternal divine state. Scripture tells us that His clothing began to glow so white that it was whiter than anything ever seen on earth. His face also began to shine. In fact, when John saw Him He was shining like the sun! And you, too, will have a glowing white robe because you will no longer be terrestrial, but celestial!

Psalm 104:2 tells us that Jesus is clothed *with light as with a garment.* Because you will see Him as He is, you will look like Jesus—as white and bright as the day, and pure as light. What a reward it will be to have that robe draped around your shoulders and be invited to walk the

shining paths of glory! But the greatest and richest part will be to hear Jesus Christ confess that you are His good and faithful servant! What a wondrous entrance into heaven!

Make a choice to live in hope. G. Campbell Morgan, a great Bible teacher in Britain a hundred years or so ago, wrote of this moment also, and he said: "You are to remember with the passion burning within you that you are not the child of today. You are not of the Earth, you are more than dust; you are the child of tomorrow, you are of the eternities, you are the offspring of Deity.

"The measurement of your lives cannot be circumscribed by the point where blue sky kisses green earth. All the facts of your life cannot be encompassed in the one small sphere upon which you live. You belong to the infinite. If you only make your fortune on the Earth—poor, sorry, silly soul—you have made a fortune, and stored it in a place where you cannot hold it. Make your fortune, but store it where it will greet you in the dawning of the new morning."⁸

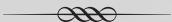
Since Jesus is going to usher you into heaven and take you to meet your Father sitting on the throne, think about what you want to send ahead. All that you did on earth is going to follow you to heaven!

I once ordered a small technical gadget over the Internet and received an e-mail asking me to track it. I had never done this sort of thing, so I hit the proper key and got this message: "Your package was put in a truck in Philadelphia and headed for the airport at 7:31." I thought: *Oh, that's great!* I checked later in the day, and this time it said: "Your package has now arrived at the Philadelphia airport." I tracked that package's whereabouts every day until finally, as I checked it for the last time, the doorbell rang and the delivery man was actually dropping it at the door. I then thought to myself: *We think nothing of tracking packages, but God says, "I'm tracking everything you've done on earth, and the part that is eternal is going to follow you—it's going to arrive with you in heaven."* The question is this: Is anything following you to heaven? When you come face-to-face with Jesus, what will you bring with you to offer the Lamb of God?

Week 49—Fall in Love with Jesus All Over Again

(Revelation 22:1–21)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you fall in love with Jesus all over again!



SUNDAY: Jesus Is Extravagant

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32, emphasis added).

When the Bible opens in Genesis, we find ourselves transported into the Garden of Eden, a paradise of perfection and beauty. When the Bible closes in Revelation 22, we are transported forward to the fringes of eternity to step out into the garden of God, that final paradise which far exceeds anything man could ever envision. And its perfection is absolutely breathtaking!

To realize how glorious heaven will be, we need to go back and meet the first two humans on earth. We need to once again listen to the inspired, accurate, and divine recounting of their experience in the Garden of Eden.

Imagine what it was like in the dawn of Creation. Think about life as a perfect human: Your first memory is that of waking up in God’s garden, Eden. You are in a comfortable world with no extremes of hot and cold, no storms, no disasters to fear. It is a secure home with no pestering bugs, no poisonous snakes, and no deadly spiders. You are surrounded with the continual beauty of fragrant and color-filled flowering orchids on the verdant green trees. Blooms never fall off, yellow, or wilt. Full, juicy fruit hangs ripe on the branches, but none falls off and rots.

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

In God’s perfect Garden of Eden, it is paradise living. 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. There are only placid and magnificent creatures reflecting the majesty of God. Around every corner of towering and graceful trees, which were each perfectly planted by God, are flocks, herds, and gatherings of exquisite animals.

Best of all is the sweet sound of the voice of the Lord. About suppertime each day, a gentle breeze whispers by, and then you hear the voice of God. The gardener and planner of the universe is walking among His creatures in the cool of the day. He desires fellowship with you, His best friends, whom He made to look just like Himself. Your ears, that He created, hear the sweetest sound of all—the voice of Jesus who created them.

And then enters the bad guy to paradise—the dragon serpent, Satan! And all of Creation is turned upside down ...

By Revelation 22, however, Satan will no longer be a threat. God will seal him in the lake of fire along with those who have refused to stop following him. But we who have listened and followed Jesus will be in the new garden of God—our eternal and glorious paradise.

All of God's children, those who have placed their faith in the Lamb's shed blood on the cross, will be dwelling in the city He has prepared for us. And it is described beautifully in Revelation 22: the Celestial City is comforting (vv. 1–5), and the Celestial City is calling us to come home (vv. 6–21).

As you experience the extravagance of Jesus, who saved and washed you from your sins, you will understand just how much He is going to lavish on you in the future garden of God!

My Prayer for You This Week: *We worship You, oh mighty King, for there is none like You! It is truly extravagant of You to have taken us from the pit, out of the miry clay, to wash and robe us with Your righteousness; to set our feet upon the Rock; to give us a new name, and a personal intimate relationship with You—and to promise to us all the rights of being a joint heir with You, oh Jesus! We are overwhelmed with unspeakable gratitude! At the conclusion of Your Revelation, we pray that we will understand how You are truly pouring out Your grace, mercy, and love in abundance—our inheritance in Christ. And we thank You in advance for that! Bless us as we study this week; fill our hearts with the wonders of who You are, Lord Jesus. Then help us to choose to live in such a way that we, too, will reflect Your wonders. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: All Things New

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:5, emphasis added).

As we come to the twenty-second chapter of Revelation, consider how unlike the first Adam is to this last Adam: Satan challenged the first man, Adam. The last Adam, Jesus, challenged

Satan by resisting him with God's Word. Satan ruined the first Adam. The last Adam crushed Satan. The first Adam involved the human race in his defeat. The last Adam included the human race in His victory. The first Adam stood as the head of the race, and falling, dragged the whole race down with him. The last Adam stood as the head of the new race, and being victorious, lifted that race with Him.

The Celestial City is comforting. In Revelation 22:1–5 we discover that our heavenly home, the Celestial City, is like a beautiful garden. As we saw a few moments ago, the garden of God seems much like the Garden of Eden. However, there are also some differences. There were four rivers in Eden (Genesis 2:10–14), but God has only one river in His Celestial City. When Ezekiel saw a river for cleansing and life, it was flowing from under the altar of the millennial temple (Ezekiel 47), but this river of life flows from God's throne because the Lord God Almighty is the source of all true purity.

In Eden, humans were prohibited from eating of "*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" and of "*the tree of life*" (Genesis 2:15–17; 3:22–24). But in the garden of God we will have unhindered access to the tree of life. As we ponder this heavenly scene, we realize that the river and the tree are not only literal but also symbolic of the abundant life we inherit in this glorious Celestial City.

When John wrote in Revelation 22:3 that there is *no more curse*, he was reminding us of the dark days of Genesis 3:14–19, when the curse began. It is also remarkable that even the Old Testament closes with the warning: "*Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*" (Malachi 4:6). But with Jesus came hope, life, and liberation from the curse. Because of Calvary, God can announce: "... *There shall be no more curse!*" For the prince of death, Satan, will be consigned to hell; the prince of life, our Lord Jesus, has liberated all of Creation, and made it new; and in heaven we will see that the curse of sin will be gone forever.¹

Note the contrasts between the old and the new in the chart below.²

PROBATIONARY WORLD (Genesis)	ETERNAL WORLD (Revelation)
Division of light and darkness (1:4)	No night there (21:25)
Division of land and sea (1:10)	No more sea (21:1)
Rule of sun and moon (1:6)	No need of sun or moon (21:23)
First heavens and earth finished (2:1–3)	New heaven and earth forever (21:1)
Man in a prepared Garden (2:8, 9)	Man in a prepared city (21:2)
River flowing out of Eden (2:10)	River flowing from God's throne (22:1)
Tree of life in the midst of the Garden (2:9)	Tree of life throughout the city (22:2)
Gold in the land (2:12)	Gold in the city (21:21)
God walking in the Garden (3:8)	God dwelling with His people (21:3), no longer coming in the cool of the day as in Genesis; we are with Him forever.

PROBATIONARY WORLD (Genesis)	ETERNAL WORLD (Revelation)
The Spirit is energizing (1:2)	The Spirit is inviting (22:17)
Garden accessible to the liar, Satan (3:1–5)	City closed to all liars (21:27)
Man in God's image (1:27)	Man in God's presence (21:3)
Man the probationer (2:17)	Man the heir (21:7)
CURSED WORLD (Genesis)	REDEEMED WORLD (Revelation)
Cursed ground (3:17)	No more curse (22:3)
Daily sorrow (3:17)	No more sorrow (21:4)
Sweat on the face (3:19)	No more tears (21:4)
Thorns and thistles (3:18)	No more pain (21:4)
Eating herbs of the field (3:18)	Twelve manner of fruits (22:2)
Death and returning to the dust (3:19)	No more death (21:4)
Coats of skins (3:21)	Fine linen, white and clean (19:14)
Satan opposing (3:15)	Satan banished (20:10)
Driven from the Garden; kept from the tree of life (3:24)	Eternal access to the tree of life (22:14)
Banished from the Garden (3:23)	Free entry to the Garden of God (22:14)
Redeemer promised (3:15)	Redemption accomplished (5:9–10)
Evil continually (6:5)	Nothing that defiles (21:27)
Seed of the woman (3:15)	Root and offspring of David (22:16)
Cherubim guarding (3:24)	Angels inviting (21:9)

So then, the end of history and the beginning of history belong together. The last leaf of the Bible corresponds with the first. Holy Scripture begins with paradise (Genesis 1:2), and with paradise it ends (Revelation 22).

TUESDAY: The Celestial City Is Calling—Come!

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” ... And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17, emphasis added).

The conclusion is greater than the beginning! The future paradise is not only that which was lost and regained, but also, above all, it is the heavenly and eternally glorified paradise.

- In the lost paradise there was danger: *In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die* (Genesis 2:17); in the glorified paradise full security reigns, and ...*there shall be no more curse ...* (Revelation 22:3).
- In the lost paradise, the serpent said: “*You will be like God*” (Genesis 3:5); in the glorified paradise Scripture says: *His name [His nature] shall be on their foreheads* (Revelation 22:4).
- In the lost paradise stood a tree of knowledge (Genesis 2:9); in the glorified paradise it is no longer required (Revelation 22:1–5)—for we behold with direct vision the face of God (Revelation 22:4), and thus have the true and personal knowledge of Him forever as our heritage.
- The lost paradise had an end through the defeat of man (Genesis 3:24); the glorified paradise abides eternally for the overcomers (Revelation 2:7), and *they shall reign for ever and ever* (Revelation 22:5).

Thoughts of the Celestial City are comforting and glorious as we await that day, but the city is also calling to us. I believe that the message of Chapter 22 starts in verse 6: *Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.”* The saints of old lived their lives looking for, longing for, and seeking a heavenly city (Hebrews 11:13). And that heavenly city is likewise calling each of us to come—to long to be there.

Revelation 22:6–21 provides these practical applications for us even in today’s age:

- **Keep the Word**—God’s Word is to be our priority (vv. 6–11, 18–19).
- **Serve God**—God’s work is to be our focus (vv. 12–14).
- **Stay pure**—godly purity is to be our goal (vv. 15–16).
- **Watch for Jesus**—Christ’s return is to be our hope (vv. 17, 20–21).

Heaven is more than a destination; it is God’s deeply moving call to action to all who are on earth. Our heavenly destiny ought to make a difference in our present lives. When the Old Testament saints learned that they had a heavenly city, it challenged them to walk with God, and to serve Him better. When Jesus needed encouragement in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced death on the cross, it was the hope of returning to His Father in heaven that strengthened Him (Hebrews 12:2). Our heavenly home should be the anchor of our souls that pulls us upward, heavenward, homeward, and Godward.

What is the first call from heaven? We need to keep His Word: ... “*These words are faithful and true.*” ... “*Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book*” (Revelation 22:6–7). This is the sixth of the seven beatitudes in which God promises a blessing.

What does “keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” mean? Jesus told us that if you obey His Word, you love Him. To love Him entails hungering for His Word, interacting diligently with His truth, and yielding to His Holy Spirit that you may be increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. Have you presented your body to Christ as a living sacrifice? Are you being continually transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (see Romans 12:1–2)? I pray so!

WEDNESDAY: The Revelation Beatitudes

Blessed is he who reads ... (Revelation 1:3a, emphasis added).

Do you recall that there are seven beatitudes—seven blessings in Revelation? Because these have application for how to prepare for heaven even now, we will go over these blessings today and tomorrow.

The First Beatitude—Christ’s Word: *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). Those who read, hear, and keep His Word are blessed!

The Second Beatitude—Christ’s Gift of Eternal Life: “... ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on ...’” (Revelation 14:13). This speaks of the happiness of those who die in the Lord, emphasizing that eternal life is a blessing. What we were, what we did, what through God’s power we accomplished in Jesus’ name while on earth, will go with us. Unbelievers must leave everything behind; but God’s children are blessed because works done in the energy of the Holy Spirit will follow us. Christ’s gift of eternal life is a blessing because we get to enjoy Jesus and offer Him our service forever.

The Third Beatitude—Christ’s Coming: “... *Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame*” (Revelation 16:15). This is an emphasis on the Lord’s return. Of course, this is for Tribulation saints because Jesus will not come for us as a thief in the night, but as our blessed and loving Bridegroom. However, His coming will be a blessing for us as well as those in the Tribulation. We should therefore all be watching for Him—keeping our garments clean, lest they become soiled with the filth of this world. For the Christian, Christ’s coming is not something to be dreaded, but a glorious blessing!

The Fourth Beatitude—Christ’s Presence: “... ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” (Revelation 19:9). To be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb is a blessed delight because Christ will be there!

The Fifth Beatitude—Christ’s Assurance: *Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection ...* (Revelation 20:6). This verse emphasizes deliverance from death. It is an assurance to those who are not raptured, those awaiting the Resurrection (sleeping in the dust, as Daniel puts it), that there is a great blessing in that they, too, will reign with Christ during the Millennium. If we have believed Christ’s Word, received His gift of eternal life, looked for Christ’s coming, and longed for His presence, then we have the blessed assurance of Jesus Christ.

THURSDAY: More of Revelation's Beatitudes

"... Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Revelation 22:7, emphasis added).

Yesterday we looked at the first five of seven beatitudes—the blessings in Revelation. Today we will see the remaining two.

The Sixth Beatitude—Christ's Service: *"... Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book"* (Revelation 22:7). There is great blessing and joy for those who heed God's Word because obedience to Him is what Jesus longs for: *"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). Never forget this point: you will find joy as you not only read and hear God's Word but also keep it! As we keep His Word by the energy and power of the Holy Spirit, to the grace of Jesus Christ, we will have the blessing of Christ's service. Serving Christ by obeying Him is both a joy and a blessing! This truth is well expressed by the lyrics of this song.

There Is Joy in Serving Jesus

*There is joy in serving Jesus, as I journey on my way;
Joy that fills the heart with praises ev'ry hour and ev'ry day.*

*There is joy in serving Jesus, joy that triumphs over pain;
Fills my soul with heaven's music, till I join the glad refrain.*

*There is joy in serving Jesus, as I walk alone with God;
'Tis the joy of Christ, my Savior, Who the path of suff'ring trod.*

*There is joy in serving Jesus, joy amid the darkest night;
For I've learned the wondrous secret, and I'm walking in the light.*

Chorus:

*There is joy, joy, joy in serving Jesus;
Joy that throbs within my heart
Ev'ry moment, ev'ry hour, as I draw upon His pow'r;
There is joy, joy, joy that never shall depart.*

—Oswald J. Smith

The Seventh Beatitude—Christ's Home: *Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city* (Revelation 22:14). This verse emphasizes the fact that He will eternally sustain us. The home

He has prepared for us is the happy result of getting that clean robe and having eternal access to the tree of life.

Now look at 22:11: "*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.*" Some people struggle with this verse because they think it means: "If you are a sinner, stay a sinner." But God is actually saying that in the eternal state there is no possibility of change.

Consider Warren Wiersbe's comments on this verse: "Does Revelation 22:11 suggest that God does not want men to repent and change their ways? No, because that would be contrary to the message of Revelation and of the gospel itself. The angel's words must be understood in light of the repeated statement, 'Behold, I come quickly' (Rev. 22:7, 12), as well as His statement, 'For the time is at hand' (Rev. 22:10). Jesus Christ's coming will occur so quickly that men will not have time to change their characters. Revelation 22:11, therefore, is a **solemn warning that decision determines character, and character determines destiny.** Suffering believers might ask, 'Is it worth it to live a godly life?' John's reply is, 'Yes! Jesus is returning, and He will reward you!' It is worth it to be righteous, [and] it is worth it to be holy but you won't be able to wait till the last minute. When you see the Lord coming, it will be too late to say yes. You must choose Him now." (Emphasis added.)³

FRIDAY: Worthy Is the Lamb!

... "**Worthy is the Lamb** who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12, emphasis added).

Today I exhort you to step into the worship center of the universe! Through the eyes of the apostle John, picture yourself standing in the vestibule and peering through the door into the chambers of the Most High. Gaze at the One who is seated on the eternal throne. As you watch, exalt God in your spirit as the endless praise ascends around His throne. Be still and know who it is before whom you stand. And then fall in love with Jesus all over again as He is at the center and focus of your worship!

Through the apostle John's descriptions, listen to the choirs of angels in numberless circles about the glassy sea and heaven's throne as they say His worthy praise. By faith's eyes and ears, listen to those eternal creatures chant, "*Holy, holy, holy.*" *The four living creatures ... do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"*" (Revelation 4:8).

Listen to the twenty-four elders as they fall down before He who sits on the throne, and cast their crowns before Him, saying: "*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).

Now see that band which no man can number singing their songs of adoration and praise:

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, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.” Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 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!” And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever (Revelation 5:9–14).

To worship the Lord God Almighty—who is worthy of all worship and praise—is your duty and purpose of existence. The Father seeks only one thing, and that is that you might worship Him. To truly worship Him is to acknowledge His “worthship” by ascribing to Him the honor, praise, glory, and majesty of which He is worthy. Do you really know Him, this Christ the Lord, who alone merits such praise?

Oh, may God enable you to see Him, the Lamb that was slain, who alone is worthy to be praised by us who owe Him our all!

SATURDAY: Experiencing Jesus

“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).

The mission that flows out of our loving fellowship, our spiritual growth, and our praise is that of being God’s faithful and obedient instruments in His divine plan to redeem the world. That plan began in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. But it did not go into effect until Adam chose to sin, fell from fellowship with God, and was spiritually separated from Him.

Since that fateful day in the Garden of Eden, fallen, natural man has been trying to hide from God, and God has been redeeming men back to Himself. From that first time of sin, it has always been God who, solely out of His own gracious love, has taken the initiative to restore men to righteousness. God has always taken the initiative for man’s salvation and restoration, from His first call to Adam, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9), to His last call in Revelation: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the Water of Life without cost” (Revelation 22:17).⁴

Revelation 22 ends the Word of God with the same themes of practical Christian living that have wound their way across most of God's Holy Scriptures: keep the Word (vv. 6–11); serve God (vv. 12–14); avoid sin (vv. 15–16); and watch for Jesus (vv. 17–21).

The same Jesus that bids us come calls us to keep on the same path He starts us on, the path of grace through faith: *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him ... (Colossians 2:6)*.

Make a choice to live in hope. If you have not yet partaken of the water of life, choose to live in hope by drinking of Him, and you will find the first true satisfaction you have ever known in your life. I pray that if your garments are soiled with sins not atoned for that you would turn to the Savior today and say, "Your blood avails for me! Save me Jesus, and forgive me!"

If you already have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus the Lord, may you keep His Word, and serve Him faithfully from now throughout all eternity. Be careful to turn from any sin that weighs you down so that you may live watching for Christ's return. Ask God to continually fill your mind and heart with the wonders of who He is and to choose to live in such a way that you reflect His wonders in your life. When all is said and done, may He enable you to say, with all your heart, "*Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!*"

It is my deep prayer that you will fall in love with Jesus all over again as you reflect upon what He has in store for you—both in this age, and in the age to come. If we learn to live in hope by falling in love with Jesus over and over again, we will be able to go through all the hardships, pains, and trials that life will bring.

One of my favorite songs is "His Eye Is on the Sparrow." The author of this hymn once described the inspiration for these precious words. Her account reminds us of how much earthly good comes from being heavenly minded.

When Civilla Martin, the author of this hymn, was visiting at a rest home, she happened upon an elderly couple who shared that they were all alone on earth, with no children, no family, and had outlived all their friends. But they had such radiance that Civilla asked how they managed without despairing through such bleak days with no visitors and no events to ever plan for. They simply said, "How could we ever be discouraged when we know that if God's eye is on a sparrow—He certainly will care for us!" That became the basis for this sweet song of living hope! May the message of its lyrics bring as much comfort and joy to your heart as it has to mine.

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

*Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

*"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

*Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

Refrain:

*I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.*

—*Civilia D. Martin, 1866–1948*

Week 50—Experience Jesus Often

(Revelation 1–22)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you experience Jesus often!



SUNDAY: The Greatest Event of All Time

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants ...
(Revelation 1:1a, emphasis added).

God has invited us to the greatest event of all time! The ultimate communication from God has arrived, and it is a beautiful work of art, a picture of vivid color and radiance. It is a full-color portrait of His Son, Jesus. God presents this photograph as His precious gift to us. We can do with it as we please, but He promises an unusual blessing to all those who take the time to look hard and close at this picture.

What is the picture? It is the unveiled Jesus of Revelation—the uncovered glory of the image of God in Christ Jesus. It is God's great gift of hope for us to share in and with a sin weary world looking for hope!

Have you been captivated by the irresistible attraction and the incomparable satisfaction of experiencing God? To all who have such a desire, our Lord proposes that experiencing His Son Jesus is the highest pleasure and greatest treasure to be found. Worshiping God is the highest calling we can have as His creation!

We were created to worship God. Yet I find more resistance in my life to worship than anything else. Distractions pour in, doubts arise, and the constant downward tug of the world, the flesh, and the devil all make it hard to focus on Jesus as He deserves. On the positive side, however, we can all agree that the most precious moments in our lives are those few that we know were spent standing consciously in the very presence of God. May I ask you to now rise to such a moment in your heart?

This week's devotionals represent an invitation to worship Christ, who died in our place, as well as to rejoice in God the Father's perfect plan for the ages. So I ask you to discipline yourself to lay aside all the plans, imaginations, and distracting thoughts of other things so that you can give the gift of your total attention to God each day. I exhort you to meditate on the Scriptures and, in a spirit of continual prayerfulness, ask the Lord to open your heart more and more to Him! This is the hardest and yet most rewarding exercise I can think of!

For today's text, I am sharing a verse from every chapter of the Revelation so that you can experience the entire book in three minutes. I encourage you to read these twenty-two references aloud right now, and hear the wonder of this powerful book.

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 (1:1).

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands'" (2:1).

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (3:6).

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this" (4:1).

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 (5:1).

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see" (6:1).

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 (7:1).

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour (8:1).

Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit (9:1).

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire (10:1).

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there” (11:1).

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars (12:1).

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name (13:1).

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads (14:1).

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete (15:1).

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth” (16:1).

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters” (17:1).

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory (18:1).

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!” (19:1).

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand (20:1).

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea (21:1).

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (22:1, 21).

My Prayer for You This Week: Father, we thank You for letting us traverse these wonderful verses in Revelation that You have given as a gift to Your people. We can think of no higher honor, no greater privilege, no more solemn responsibility than to come before Your presence throughout today and every day. 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 thank You for Christ's cleansing blood shed on our behalf. We come worshipfully and overflowing with joy, asking that You would accept the upraised hearts we are offering to You. We pray that every part of our upcoming last glimpse through Revelation will have Your favor upon it. Meet with us in an unusual way—in a very special and transforming and glorifying way in our lives—so we will know that surely we have been with Jesus, in whose name we ask all this. Amen.

MONDAY: Your Beloved Bridegroom

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2, emphasis added).

As you worship Jesus you will discover what it means to experience Him, for He is wonderful, glorious, and He is your beloved Bridegroom! As you start in the process of worshiping Him, I encourage you to sit still before Him in front of His awesome majesty, for He says to you: *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth* (Psalm 46:10 NIV).

Start your worship silently before the majesty of our Lord on high: *"The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him"* (Habakkuk 2:20 NIV).

As you comprehend even a fraction of who He is, and how utterly magnificent He is, stop again in awe, with wondrous reverence and sheer delight. Think of the magnitude of His power, might, and infinitude. Agree with the psalmist who said, *Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him* (Psalm 33:8 NIV). Honor the Lord for who He is, for how greatly He is to be praised, and how He is infinitely above all that is mundane—and yet He condescends to us of low degree to meet with us. Hallelujah!

As you linger in the glow of His presence, your lack of holiness should become painfully revealed: *For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite"* (Isaiah 57:15 NIV).

Are you experiencing a pang of hunger for Christ yet? Do you desire to know Him, love Him, and adore Him more and more? Your heart should be filling up with wonder and gratitude for even the chance to have this moment. And your heart, like the psalmist's, should echo: *O God,*

you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1 NIV).

Awash with wonder by now, you should be feeling the sheer delight of a new hope as He begins to flood your soul with His response of bearing away the deadening load of your sin. If you feel the burden lifted, the stains removed, the coldness warmed, and the emptiness filled, you are experiencing your God. So go ahead and boldly ask Him: *One thing I ask of the LORD ...: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple* (Psalm 27:4 NIV).

The whole book of Revelation expounds upon that temple in which you can worship the Lord. In His Revelation you will discover that you can: worship Jesus for His majesty (Revelation 1); worship Jesus for His message (Revelation 2–3); worship Jesus for His mission (Revelation 4–19); and worship Jesus for His mansions (Revelation 20–22).

So worship Jesus throughout Revelation by experiencing your wonderful, glorious, and beloved Bridegroom!

TUESDAY: Worship Jesus for His Majesty

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).

Let us now look at how you can worship every facet of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1.

Worship the ministry of Jesus. In Revelation 1:1–3, Jesus desires to reveal Himself to His bondservants who will pay attention. *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him ...* (2 Chronicles 16:9). He is always looking for those whose hearts will be focused on Him so that He can reveal Himself to them. The Spirit of Christ speaking through Moses said, [If] *you will seek the LORD your God ... you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul* (Deuteronomy 4:29). Worship Jesus for His ministry of revealing Himself to His children!

Worship the peace of Jesus. Revelation 1:4 reveals that He offers *grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come* This reveals the rest that is yours in Christ; so worship Jesus for the peace that He so freely gives!

Worship the blood of Jesus. In Revelation 1:5 we see that Jesus is *the firstborn from the dead*. The blood He shed on the cross is your source of eternal life. Because He sacrificed His life for you, worship Jesus for the blood He shed—give your life back to Him!

Worship the plan of Jesus. Revelation 1:7–8 and 9–20 reveal His heart when He said, “I am coming” and “I am the Alpha and Omega.” He is the One who began, and is going to finish, all things. Worship Jesus for His plan to reveal His heart because He wants you to know and trust Him!

Worship the eyes of Jesus. Revelation 1:14 reveals Jesus' omniscience: *His eyes were as a flame of fire* (KJV). He reveals His all-seeing omniscience as He looks into your life and sees what no one else can see. He sees the fears and deepest needs of your heart. As He sees what you don't want anyone else to see, He will remove those things if you ask Him. So worship Jesus for His eyes that search your soul to see if there is any wicked way in you!

Worship the voice of Jesus. Revelation 1:15 reveals His omnipotence. His voice can be so sweet and yet it can also be like *the sound of many waters*. Jesus has the power to accomplish all things in your life as you yield to Him. So worship Jesus for His voice that reveals His almighty omnipotence!

Worship the touch of Jesus. Revelation 1:17 reveals His humanity: *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me.* He identifies with you and is able to meet you where you are. Worship Jesus for His gentle and loving touch!

Worship the glory of Jesus. Revelation 1:9–20 reveals His character. When John was on Patmos, he heard the sound of the Spirit raising him up and opening his mind to God and the trumpet sound. As he turned to hear the voice, he saw a man standing there. It was then that Jesus unveiled that He is the glorious Son of Man. Worship this Jesus for His glory!

Imagine what it must have been like for John to hear a voice like a trumpet and then to see these **seven perfections of Jesus' divinity**.

- 1. The Perfect Man:** Jesus can identify with us 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 4:15). As the perfect man in His divinity, He now comes to us as "Son of Man" (eighty-four times He calls Himself this; but no one else does). He came to seek and to save the lost of Adam's fallen race—as the Son of Man, He is the conqueror of Adam's fallen race.
- 2. The Perfect Priest:** He is robed to the feet as the perfect priest. All other priests carried around sacrifices, but this priest was himself the perfect sacrifice who died for us. As Hebrews pictures Him, He is ever-living to intercede for us.
- 3. The Perfect Judge:** As the judge, He was girded around His breast with a gold band, which was an ancient symbol of restrained emotions. He judges rightly because He is sinless, and full of love and wisdom. No one but He can make decisions perfectly!
- 4. The Perfect Image of God:** He is white-haired as the Ancient of Days. His white hair is a sign of maturity, and absolute holiness. (In Daniel 7:9 we see this same description.) Hebrews 1:3 tells us: ... *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.*

5. **The Perfect Truth:** With His eyes of fire, Jesus is the seer of all secrets. He is a penetrating scrutinizer who can discover and, with consuming light, reveal secrets. As Psalm 19:6 reminds us that ... *nothing is hidden* (NIV) from the eyes of the One who is Truth. He sees clearly, and will leave no sin unpunished but those hidden beneath His blood.
6. **The Perfect Defender:** He is a trampler of foes! Those feet of military bronze will crush His enemies—even those who cry out: “Lord, Lord!” But Scripture says “He never knew them.” With His brazen feet, the ultimate judge will crush all foes!
7. **The Perfect Communicator:** With the voice of God as thunderous as the twelve million cubic feet of water crashing at Niagara’s base every hour, commanding all to pay attention, the deaf and the dead can hear it—and so should we!

Jesus is the Christ. Christ is the One who fulfills all the promises of God perfectly. In everything He is perfect, complete, and our all in all.

WEDNESDAY: Worship Jesus for His Message

I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet ... (Revelation 1:10, emphasis added).

Yesterday we saw that we should worship Jesus for His majesty. Today we will see that we should worship Jesus for His message. Here is the start of a study of all the promises Jesus gave to His seven churches, which represented all of us in His church.

True believers have an abundant life: “... *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). He is revealed as the infinite One, and He begins giving His message that true believers will have an abundant life! As Jesus has promised, “*He who believes in Me, ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*” (John 7:38). This means that believers will have infinite life in paradise regained (John 3:16).

Jesus offers an overflowing life: “*Whoever believes in me, ... streams of living water will flow from within him*” (John 7:38 NIV). He also offers an extraordinary life: “... *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10).

True believers have an indestructible life: “... *He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death*” (Revelation 2:11). Jesus’ message also says that true believers will be overcomers. We will not be hurt by anything Satan can throw at us because we are indestructible. We live, as the writer of Hebrews says, after the power of an endless life.

Believers are secure from any physical adversary: “*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand*” (John 10:28–29).

They are also secure from any spiritual adversary: *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38–39).

True believers have 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 said, “I came to give you an inexhaustible supply. I will nourish you, and intimately reveal myself to you; I will give you all things good!” If we just come to Him, His supply will never run out.

Believers have all their spiritual needs 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). They also have all their spiritual desires 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 NIV).

True believers have an inexpressible future: “*He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—*” (Revelation 2:26).

Believers will be rewarded 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). Believers will also be overwhelmed by God with unbelievable pleasures: ... *He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter* (2 Corinthians 12:4).

The more you experience Jesus here on earth, the more you can talk about the unbelievable glory of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ. Oh, how I pray that you long to see that place He is preparing for you!

THURSDAY: Overcomers Will Be Blessed!

“*He who overcomes ...*” (Revelation 3:5a, emphasis added).

Today’s devotional is a continuation of worshiping Jesus for His message!

True believers have incredible coverage: “*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). The white garments speak of holiness, joy, and honor bestowed upon us by Jesus.

Believers have Christ as their garment: ... *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts* (Romans 13:14). Believers have Christ as their Advocate: *But He ... has an unchangeable priesthood. ... He is also 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). Believers also have Christ as their relative: ... *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God*

and 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).

Believers will be a pillar because we are secure: “*Let not your heart be troubled In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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 will never have to fear for our future!

Believers will also have a special 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 which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world*” (John 17:24).

True believers have intimacy with God: “*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*” (Revelation 3:21).

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: “*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (John 17:3). And 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).

Jesus came to give, and to give more abundantly! Have you received what He offers? Are you worshiping Him as He deserves? Worship the message of Jesus because it challenges you to listen to Him. Look again at what He has to say to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3:

- 1. Ephesus:** Worship the **jealousy of Jesus** because He challenges you to exalt Him to be **all that you really love**.
- 2. Smyrna:** Worship the **hope of Jesus** because He challenges you to exalt Him to be **all that you truly possess**.
- 3. Pergamos:** Worship the **security of Jesus** because He challenges you to exalt Him to be **all that you cling to**.
- 4. Thyatira:** Worship the **chastisement of Jesus** because He challenges you to exalt Him to be **all that you fear**.
- 5. Sardis:** Worship the **riches of Jesus** because He challenges you to exalt Him to be **all that you value**.

6. **Philadelphia:** Worship the **approval of Jesus** because He challenges you to exalt Him to be **all that you enjoy**.
7. **Laodicea:** Worship the **request of Jesus** as He tells us to repent of anything that keeps us from Him; He challenges you to exalt Him to be **all that you need**.

FRIDAY: Worship Jesus for His Mission

Now 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 (Revelation 19:11, emphasis added).

Worship Jesus not only for His majesty and His message, but also for His mission, which is clearly seen in Revelation 4–19.

- **Worship the loveliness of Jesus** as He is at the center and focus of your worship, saying: “*You are worthy, O Lord!*” (Revelation 4)
- **Worship the sacrifice of Jesus** at the throne of the universe as the Lamb of God. For worthy is the Lamb who was slain! (Revelation 5)
- **Worship the wrath of Jesus** as He unleashes the seals that display His holy wrath against sin. (Revelation 6)
- **Worship the love of Jesus** as He, in the midst of the destruction of the planet, sends His witnesses to rescue more lost and helpless sinners by giving them the gospel message. (Revelation 7)
- **Worship the patience of Jesus** as He controls His wrath to listen and respond to prayer while He awaits His perfect timing and continues to freely offer salvation. (Revelation 8)
- **Worship the judgment of Jesus** as He judges hardened and unrepentant sinners. (Revelation 9)
- **Worship the mystery of Jesus** as judge, for “*the little book*” given to John to eat, and that the mystery of His plan will be finished—just as He declared through His servants, the prophets. (Revelation 10)

- **Worship the witness of Jesus** by trusting His Word through the two witnesses that all things that God has promised will be fulfilled. (Revelation 11)
- **Worship the victory of Jesus** as He shows His people His ultimate triumph. God's saints are seen overcoming the devil by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony—and by not loving their lives unto death. (Revelation 12)
- **Worship the genuineness of Jesus** as He exposes the *lies* of Antichrist—the counterfeit christ who so poorly represents the infinite eternal Jesus. (Revelation 13)
- **Worship the compassion of Jesus** in sending the everlasting gospel even when the earth is falling apart and the nations are under the wrath of God. (Revelation 14)
- **Worship the beauty of Jesus** in the splendor of His redeeming love while the redeemed sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb as they worship His works, His power, His ways, and His plan. (Revelation 15)
- **Worship the power of Jesus** as He judges the horror of locked hearts to show people the atrocities of their sin. (Revelation 16)
- **Worship Jesus as the bride of Jesus** when this chapter unmasks the apostasy of the last days and reveals the true bride (born-again believers) who will sit at the feet of her beloved Bridegroom. (Revelation 17)
- **Worship the authority of Jesus** judging materialism and acclaiming true values as He keys in to humanity's great lack of real values. (Revelation 18)
- **Worship at the banquet for the marriage of Jesus** as He celebrates union with His bride—the saints of all the ages. Join in the hallelujahs they offer for His salvation and the judgment of the lost and the wicked. (Revelation 19:1–10)
- **Worship the re-entry of Jesus** as He conquers the rebellion, He who is called Faithful and True in righteousness, He whose name is King of Kings and Lord of Lords! (Revelation 19:11–21)

SATURDAY: Worship Jesus for His Mansions

"Let not your heart be troubled In My Father's house are many mansions I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1–2, emphasis added).

Worship Jesus not only for His majesty, His message, and His mission, but also for His beautiful mansions that are so clearly seen in Revelation 20-22. Now we see what He promised to go and prepare for us.

- **Worship the triumph of Jesus** as He vanquishes the devil into the bottomless pit, and renews the earth. (Revelation 20:1–10)
- **Worship the last word of Jesus** damning the rebels to the lake of fire—those whose names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (Revelation 20:11–15)
- **Worship the honeymoon of Jesus** as He unveils paradise to His bride, and leads us prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1–8)
- **Worship the wonders of Jesus** as from a high mountain He shows His bride all the beauty of the Holy Jerusalem radiating His glory as it descends out of heaven from God. (Revelation 21:9–27)
- **Worship the extravagance of Jesus** who, like Boaz of old, has freely offered overflowing handfuls of His blessings of salvation to all who will come to Him. (Revelation 22:1–21)
- **Worship the entire experience of Jesus** as He opens and closes the Revelation of Himself! (Revelation 1–22)

Make a choice to live in hope. As you worship the Jesus of Revelation, you are choosing to live in hope by discovering what it means to experience the Son of God for who He is—your beloved Bridegroom. Whether in this life or the next, what He wants from you most, as His bride, is your worship and your love! Why not pause and reverently worship Jesus by singing the first few stanzas of this song to Him.

My Jesus, I Love Thee

*My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

*I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me,
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

*I'll love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death,
And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath;
And say, when the death dew lies cold on my brow;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

—William R. Featherston, 1846–1873

The last stanza will lift your heart up to glory, and you will have an opportunity to worship the Lord through it in a moment. But as an introduction, I want to first share Joni Eareckson Tada's recollection of the beauty of her wedding day because she well relates that event to the greatest day in paradise when we will all celebrate the marriage of the Lamb!

The morning of my wedding day was utterly unique and memorable. And not for reasons you might think. It started in the church bridal salon with my girlfriends laying me down on a couch. They had to shift my paralyzed body this way and that in order to pull my voluminous gown over me. After I was corseted, buttoned, and lifted back into my wheelchair, they gingerly draped my gown over a thick wire mesh covering my wheels so the fabric wouldn't get caught in the spokes. When the organ music began, I wheeled toward the door, stopping for a second in front of a full-length mirror. I looked a little like a float at the Rose Parade.

The glass doors of the sanctuary opened, and I positioned myself at the top of the aisle, breathing deeply to steady my nerves. Just before the wedding march I glanced down at my gown. I groaned. Somehow I had wheeled over the hem and left a greasy tire mark. My dress hung clumped and uneven—no amount of buckling and binding had helped. My chair was spiffed up, but it was still the big clunky thing it always was. My bouquet of daisies was off-center on my lap since my paralyzed hands couldn't hold them. I was not the picture-perfect bride you see in magazines.

My last bridesmaid finished her walk down the aisle, and the organ music crescendoed. I inched my chair closer to the last pew, wanting to catch a glimpse of Ken. Suddenly I spotted him way down front, standing at attention and looking tall and elegant in his formal attire. My face grew hot. My heart began to pound. He was craning his neck to look up the aisle. Our eyes met and, amazingly, from that point everything changed.

How I looked no longer mattered. I forgot all about my wheelchair. Grease stains? Flowers out of place? Who cares? No longer did I feel ugly or unworthy; the love in Ken's eyes washed it all away. I was the pure and perfect bride. That's what he saw, and that's what changed me. It took great restraint not to jam my 'power stick' into high gear and race down the aisle to reach the front and be with Ken. It was the happiest day of my life.

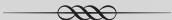
I think heaven will be a little like that. ... [We] fix our eyes on Jesus, believe and obey, all the while trusting He has clothed us in His righteousness. On that glorious Day, all He'll see is our 'fine linen, bright and clean.' All He'll see is His beautiful bride.

And one look from Him will change us forever. All the stains of earthly life will be purified away just by one searching of those eyes. Our faces will flush, our hearts will pound, for it will be more than we ever dreamed of, more than we ever longed for. And at the sight of our Bridegroom we just might sing ... *In mansions of glory and endless delight, I'll ever adore thee in heaven so bright; I'll sing with the glittering crown on my brow: If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.¹¹*

Week 51—The First Coming of Jesus

(Christmas Message—Luke 1 and Matthew 2)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you ponder the first coming of Jesus!



SUNDAY: God Uses Ordinary People

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth (Luke 1:5, emphasis added).

For the past fifty weeks, the Second Coming of Jesus has been uppermost in our minds and hearts. For the remaining two weeks, since those who began reading this book on January 1 are now celebrating the first coming of Jesus, we will reflect upon the glorious Christ of Christmas, the Promised One—the Savior who came to a manger one dark night to bear away the sin of the world. For without His loving sacrifice on Calvary, none of us could have living hope for the end of days!

The characters that God chose to put into the Christmas story are what we would call ordinary, like the couple we are introduced to in Luke 1:5, Zacharias and Elizabeth. They were ordinary people, who lived with all the ordinary troubles, stresses, and pains of life. They even had an ordinary response to God—mixed belief and unbelief.

Zacharias and Elizabeth also had an ordinary occupation in Jerusalem in the first century; we would call them religious professionals. They were a priest and his wife who lived and worked in the shadow of the temple of God. Being from the priestly family, they could trace their family tree back to Aaron and the tribal genealogy of Levi.

From their earliest days, Zacharias and Elizabeth had known about the Lord. They had grown up much like many Americans of past generations—surrounded by the truth, seeing and hearing it in many ways and places. So, in that sense, we all are ordinary people. We all share the same struggles, trials, and pains of life.

But one thing about Zacharias and Elizabeth was extraordinary—*they actually believed all that Truth about God.* Because He was real to them, they loved and served Him as best they could. As with each of the other godly members of the Christmas story—Joseph and Mary, the shepherds and the Magi, Simeon and Anna—their lives are examples to us of how to see Christ clearly this Christmas. For how these ordinary persons lived stands in direct contrast to another similar group that we will study this week—the religious professionals who did not internalize the truth.

Even to this day, it is amazing how the true story of Christmas can polarize a family, a church, a nation, and a world. All around us nearly everyone is comfortable with this “holiday season.” But press the issue of Christ, and Him being at the center of Christmas, then things change immediately. For example, try to display a representation of Christ’s birth on public land, or try to call a Christmas tree by that name, and the entire government goes into overdrive. Sadly, we live in a post-Christian era. However, that only makes the message of Christmas even more precious and distinct!

In today’s devotional, we will examine the contrast between Zacharias and Elizabeth and the ungodly religious professionals identified in the Christmas story. The differences are so stark and distinct that I consider them to be like continental divides—junctures of monumental and eternal proportions. Here is an illustration of that point. On a family trip, as we glided along the interstate highways crossing the Appalachian Mountains, I noticed this sign:

Continental Divide:
A raindrop falling on this side
will flow to the Gulf of Mexico;
one falling on the other side will flow to the Atlantic.

Afterward, that sign made me think of the Christmas story and the junctures and choices of monumental eternal proportions that God’s people made. Zacharias and Elizabeth’s little acts of obedience, choices, affirmations of consecration, and cries to their great God made completely divergent endings to their lives in contrast to that of the other religious professionals. They all did the same work in the same place; they even wore the same clothes and lived in the same houses. The main difference between the two groups was that Zacharias and Elizabeth were looking forward to the first coming of Jesus; the other group was not looking for Him at all. That difference is what I liken to a continental divide.

As I gave some more thought to continental divides, separators that determine destinations, a very sobering feeling settled over my heart and mind: two raindrops can fall just inches apart—yet arrive at two vastly different destinations. The Christmas story itself contains just such a picture of two “raindrops”: two sets of people—so close in every way—yet so far apart in destiny.

That is what America has become. We have an entire nation of almost 300 million people listening to the same songs, seeing the same nativity scenes, and going to the same holiday events. But one group is blessed beyond words while the other group heads to a different destination.

The lesson for us at Christmas is therefore this: beware of being *acquainted with Christ* but never *knowing Him*. Zacharias and Elizabeth were not only acquainted with Him, but also believed.

Are you seeing Jesus this Christmas? Or are you missing out on all that God offers you? Everyone who was looking for Jesus to come welcomed His arrival. Who are you going to be like this Christmas—Zacharias and Elizabeth or the religious professionals?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, we thank You for the lessons we can learn from the lives of Your faithful servants, Zacharias and Elizabeth. For these ordinary people had an extraordinary relationship with You! May we see You through their eyes, who by faith saw You. I praise you for Zacharias' extraordinary song—his beautiful psalm of praise to You—because it reminds us of our precious salvation. Through his words, may we want to worship You, and affirm those little choices that make our “raindrop” flow a different direction. We pray that this week's devotionals will be a “continental divide” in our lives so that we stop and reaffirm what is true about You. May we not let this Christmas season go by without being among those who see Your coming, and talk about Your coming, and experience the joy of “God with us”—redeeming us, cleansing us, forgiving us, and keeping us from all our fears. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

MONDAY: A Christmas Blessing for Ordinary People

... They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Luke 1:6, emphasis added).

The names of this righteous couple have special significance related to the first coming of Christ. Zacharias means “God remembers” and Elizabeth means “His oath”; together their names mean “God remembers His oath.” What was that oath? In Psalm 89 God made a promise to David that one of his descendants would have an eternal reign. When God broke through human history after four hundred years of silence, Luke set the stage for us to see that Christ is that promised One. And in Luke 1, we see that God chose Zacharias to witness His speaking for the first time in centuries.

God uses people who are busily doing what He has called them to do. He didn't ask Zacharias and Elizabeth to alter their lives. God used them right where they were, and that is common in the Scriptures. When we are busy doing what He has called us to do, God will direct us into further and wider fields of ministry.

Zacharias was just one of 24,000 priests serving at the temple two weeks per year. While placing fresh incense upon the altar (a once-in-a-lifetime service) before the great curtain within the Holy of Holies, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias with a message from God. When he announced John's coming birth, disbelief set in. Because Zacharias doubted, Gabriel

told him he would be mute until the child was born. Now he, instead of God, was the one who would be silent for a season.

God often uses struggling people: *But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years* (Luke 1:7). Zacharias and Elizabeth were good models of how to persevere in spite of what others might call extraordinary challenges. You see, their world measured God's blessing and personal worth by whether or not you had a son. In the Jewish culture, the passing on of the name, the tradition, the heritage, and the family right was so very important. Thus, every woman who wasn't able to have children bore a stigma, and this caused very deep pain. So Zacharias and Elizabeth spent their entire married life hoping for a child, a son in particular. But they didn't let that cripple them. They just kept on faithfully doing what God called them to do, and that is the kind of people that He uses.

God loves to use ordinary people. Elizabeth may have been an ordinary woman by all outward signs, but inwardly she was anything but ordinary because she chose to respond to God with amazing obedience. Although Zacharias wrestled with doubt, Elizabeth believed the Lord. She was rewarded by His taking away her "*reproach among people*" (Luke 1:24–25). She became the first example of a New Testament woman of faith—one who endured her difficulties and enjoyed the blessing and favor of God. Either way, whether struggling or blessed, she was determined to serve the Lord.

There is something else unique about Elizabeth: she was the first recorded New Testament person filled with the Spirit (1:41). I love that about her. Isn't it amazing that God picked an ordinary woman for that honor? What a model of having a responsive heart to the Lord! Of course, John the Baptist (1:15) and Zacharias (1:67) were also filled with the Spirit. This family is actually what we would call the first Spirit-filled family of the New Testament.

Elizabeth was the first recorded "Titus 2 woman" as she encouraged Mary (1:45). Think of what a ministry Elizabeth had to Mary, a young woman with so many challenges as an unwed mother in the Jewish culture. As an older woman who had herself borne reproach, Elizabeth had walked with God for many years. Thus, she could confidently assure Mary that God would bring to pass all that He had revealed to her. Elizabeth was ordinary by man's standards, but extraordinary by God's because she let Him do whatever He wanted to in her life.

Elizabeth told God, "I want to do what You want me to do. If You want me to go through life barren, and looked down upon, then that is fine with me. I will trust Your grace." But when God later announced, "I want to make you the mother of My last great Old Testament prophet and the herald of the New Testament," she quickly responded, "Then that is what I want to do." In whatever God asked of her, Elizabeth humbly chose to serve the Lord!

Perhaps you yourself feel ordinary, like you are "just a number" on a crowded planet. But it doesn't have to be that way. By faith, the Lord can work wonders in your life. You were created for a purpose; there is no one quite like you. In that sense, you are a spiritual snowflake. God blended you together with a certain mix of His gifts and abilities. Thus, He has a calling for your life that no one else can accomplish but you!

TUESDAY: Christmas Put a Song in Our Hearts

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14, emphasis added).

Did you realize that at that first Christmas God introduced New Testament believers to the songs of heaven? Christ’s birth was surrounded by the songs of the saints. Since Luke continued with the record of the early church in Acts, and Paul told us that Spirit-filled saints sing, we can be sure that the early church sang much and often.

Luke recorded a series of five Spirit-prompted songs:

1. Elizabeth broke into song at Mary’s arrival. This was the first song of the New Testament, which is known from the first words of the Latin Vulgate as the “Exclamavit” (1:42–45).
2. Mary followed with her marvelous “Magnificat” (1:46–55), in which she quotes over twenty different Scriptures!
3. Zacharias broke forth into his famous “Benedictus” (1:68–79), which means “good saying.”
4. Angels broke into the night sky over the shepherds’ fields of Bethlehem with “Gloria” (2:14).
5. While holding the infant Jesus in his arms, Simeon lifted his eyes to God and sang his “Nunc Dimittis” (2:29–32).

And some day, when we at last enter into Christ’s presence, Revelation says that we will forever be singing that He alone is worthy!

The song Zacharias sang summarized John’s ministry of pointing to Jesus. It introduced the coming One, and explained why Jesus came. But it also reflected notes from Zacharias’ forty-plus weeks of Bible study as he waited in mute silence for his son’s birth.

By the act of faith naming his son “John,” as Gabriel had instructed (Luke 1:63), God loosed Zacharias’ tongue and, filled with the Holy Spirit, he burst forth into this hymn:

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our

enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, 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 1:68-79).

If you examine Zacharias' song closely, you will see beautiful pictures of what the first coming of Jesus really means.

Jesus came to open our prison door—our lives are redeemed (v. 68). The first thing Zacharias points out is that Jesus redeems: He buys us out of slavery. There is great power in the word “redeem,” which means “to set free by paying a price.” It referred to the ancient custom of releasing a prisoner, or liberating a slave, by purchasing them. Jesus Christ came to earth to bring *“deliverance to the captives”* (Luke 4:18 KJV).

There is NO BONDAGE that Christ’s power cannot break. There is no secret or public sin from which Jesus cannot liberate us: no bondage too costly, no bondage too powerful, and no bondage too gripping. Simply say to Him, “Jesus, open the prison door of my bondage—I want to be set free!” John 8:36 says, *“If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”*

There is NO FEAR that Christ’s presence cannot banish. Jesus says to us, “My presence is with you at all times!” (Matthew 28:20b). Are you chained to fear about the past, the present, or the future? Simply say to Him, “Jesus, redeem me from my fears!”

There is NO STAIN that Christ’s precious blood cannot cleanse. There is no stain too deep for the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse (Revelation 1:5b). Simply say to Him: “Lord Jesus, cleanse me now,” and hear Him say, “I am willing—be clean.”

There is NO PAST that Christ’s Words cannot make new. When the woman caught in adultery stood alone before the Lord, Jesus said, “Is there no one left to condemn you?” And she replied, *“No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more”* (John 8:11). You, too, can have a fresh start. Simply say to Him: “Jesus, let me start over again in You. Give me Your new beginning!”

Christ’s power can set you free from any bondage; His presence can dispel any fear; His blood can cleanse any sin; and His forgiveness and compassion can give you a new beginning. All you have to do is ask. What a Savior!

WEDNESDAY: Christmas Means Victory in Jesus

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21, emphasis added).

Let us now continue our look at the song of Zacharias, his “Benedictus”—a beautiful psalm of praise to God.

Jesus came to defeat our enemies—our enemy was defeated (vv. 69–75). In the Old Testament a horn symbolizes power and victory (1 Kings 22:11; Psalm 89:17, 24). As Zacharias studied the Scriptures, he reflected upon God as He is often pictured in the Old Testament—delivering the army of His people as they were about to be taken captive. When the Lord arises, the enemy is defeated. In the first word picture, we as captives are set free. In the second word picture our enemy is defeated *so that he cannot capture us as prisoners any more*. God offers total victory to us, His people.

Warren Wiersbe writes: “The word salvation (Luke 1:69, 71) carries the meaning of ‘health and soundness.’ No matter what the condition of the captives, their Redeemer brings spiritual soundness. When you trust Jesus Christ as Savior, you are delivered from Satan’s power, moved into God’s kingdom, redeemed, and forgiven (Col. 1:12–14).

“Where did the Redeemer come from? He came from the house of David (Luke 1:69), who himself was a great conqueror. God had promised that the Savior would be a Jew (Gen. 12:1–3), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), from the family of David (2 Sam. 7:12–16), born in David’s city, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Both Mary (Luke 1:27) and Joseph (Matt. 1:20) belonged to David’s line. The coming of the Redeemer was inherent in the covenants God made with His people (Luke 1:72), and it was promised by the prophets (Luke 1:70).

“Note that the results of this victory are sanctity and service (Luke 1:74–75). He sets us free, not to do our own will, because that would be bondage, but to do His will and enjoy His freedom.”¹

No enemy can stand before Christ: not death, darkness, despair, defeat, or defilement. In John 8:31–32, 36 Jesus promises to those who believe in Him: *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. ... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”*

Jesus came to pay our debts—our debt was cancelled by His death (vv. 76–77). All of us are in debt to God because we have broken His law and failed to live up to His standards (Luke 7:40–50). Furthermore, all of us are spiritually bankrupt, unable to pay our debt. But Jesus came and paid the debt for us (Psalm 103:12; John 1:29). This is the glorious truth of our great salvation through Christ.

- When Jesus JUSTIFIED us, we as sinners stood before God as accused, and were declared righteous by His imputed righteousness.
- When Jesus REDEEMED us, we as sinners stood before God as slaves and were granted freedom by His ransom.
- When Jesus FORGAVE us, we as sinners stood before God as debtors and our debt was cancelled by His payment.
- When Jesus RECONCILED us, we as sinners stood before God as enemies and were made friends by His peace.

- When Jesus ADOPTED us, we as sinners stood before God as strangers and were called sons and daughters by His choice.

Jesus, the “*Dayspring from on high*,” came to bring the dawning of a new day that knows no night—our night was ended by His Light (Luke 1:78-79). *Dayspring* means “sunrise.” God’s Word sees lost people as those sitting in darkness, death, and distress. But Christ’s birth brought light, life, and peace. His birth was the dawn of a new day because of the tender mercies of God.

Jesus is the only key to the day that knows no night. He came into a manger one dark night to bear away the sin of the world. And He will take your penalty, your debt, your stain, and your sin if you ask Him to.

The story of Christmas is that the Sunrise has come—He is here. If you haven’t already done so, I pray that you will open your heart to Him!

THURSDAY: The Other Side of the Continental Divide

... *Choose ... this day whom you will serve ...* (Joshua 24:15a, emphasis added).

As we saw earlier this week, there are continental divides—separators that determine destinations. A raindrop falling on one side will flow to the Gulf of Mexico; one falling on the other side will flow to the Atlantic. Two raindrops can fall just inches apart, and yet arrive at two vastly different destinations.

Two people can live side-by-side, walk through life so similarly, yet in the end go to opposite destinations. One chooses eternal life in the new paradise; the other chooses eternal separation from God in the lake of fire. Zacharias and Elizabeth made the right choice; the chief priests and scribes made the wrong one—they were close to God in every way but in their hearts.

How close can you get to Jesus and still be too far away? That is what the religious leaders of Christ’s day demonstrate to us this Christmas. So close they were, and yet so far away they remained. It is possible to be as close as they were, and yet miss all that Christ and Christmas have to offer.

In Matthew 2:1–6 the chief priests and scribes were summoned by King Herod. When he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born, they instantly responded “*in Bethlehem*.” But the story stopped there for them. No delegation was chosen to go find the Christ child; there was no serious inquiry, no personal seeking, and no investigation by the Bible scholars. They knew the truth, but didn’t believe it in their hearts. Oh, the danger of being so close to God in every way, except in our hearts!

Who were these priests and scribes in Matthew 2:4? Most likely the priests were descendants of Aaron and Zadok, who were designated to watch over the temple sacrifices. The scribes were descendants of Ezra, the great Old Testament scholar. Because language had changed over the centuries, Ezra took the Scriptures from the Mosaic and Davidic times and copied and unified them into a Hebrew that the people could read.

The lack of character in these men was in direct contrast to Ezra's. In Ezra 7:10, we find that he prepared his heart, did as God directed, and then taught the law. But by Christ's time, Ezra's descendants were only teaching the law. They weren't preparing their hearts or following God's commands.

Zacharias, however, was so moved by what the Lord told him that he entered into an even more intense study to prepare himself to know about the birth of John. While he was mute, he followed the tradition of Ezra and studied God's Word. In Zacharias' "Benedictus" (Luke 1:68-79), he used promises of Christ's coming from Psalms 18, 23, 32, 34, 83, 106, and 132 in addition to quotations from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Malachi.

Zacharias' life modeled Ezra's devotion to God's Word, but this type of personal devotion in a religious professional was rare. Out of thousands, only four got to see Jesus Christ, and two of them were women who weren't even in the count: Anna and Elizabeth. Today, with all the songs about Christmas, if you feel all alone in your worship of God when you hear the sacred music, it is understandable. That is how it has been from the beginning. The indifferent and Christ-neglecting religious leaders are a warning to us today. Think of all the opportunities these religious professionals had to get close to God.

They daily lived in the presence of God. Old Testament worship centered around the tabernacle and then the temple—in the building where His presence dwelt in better days. When the shekinah glory had been there, they did not even need light inside the Holy of Holies. For nearly 1,500 years, divinely designed liturgy was carried on in the way Moses was directed by God on Mount Sinai.

They daily saw the symbols and pictures of salvation. Exodus 25-40 describes the tabernacle the priests entered to go into the presence of God. They understood that the altar of incense typified the intercessory work of Christ; the table of showbread was a picture of the fellowship—the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ; and that the ever-lit lampstand represented the illumination of the Spirit of God. These men were surrounded by the symbols and got to work in the very presence of God!

They daily held the holy revelation of God's Word. Most people could not afford a personal copy of God's Word, but these men were surrounded by mountains of scrolls. They were read, discussed, copied, and stored everywhere around them. The scribes even wore ink pots tied to their belts because it was a very revered thing to copy God's Word.

They daily sang from the Psalms. Each day the temple rituals included public readings, Levitical singing, and chanting of God's Word. Most of these men would have read these regular portions so frequently that they would know long passages and even many chapters by memory.

They wore clothing daily that reminded them in every way of God. As prescribed by Moses, to set them apart and help them realize that things were extraordinary when they came before God, upon arrival in the temple area, priests changed into white robes and special sashes. Those who were involved in the sacrifices would have had blood splashed upon them every day as an innocent and spotless animal was slain. The offerer would place his hands on its head, confess his sins and those of his family, and then the priest would kill the animal, catch its blood,

pour it around the altar, and burn the sacrifice. This was a complete picture of the sinless Lamb of God, who spotlessly offered Himself on the cross of Calvary to shed His blood for the sin of the world.

What was wrong with their performing this liturgy? The priests only held God's Word in their hands, but not in their hearts. God was only near in their mouths, but not in their hearts. And that is exactly what is going on in so many churches around the world today. Countless people are close in every way to God: they go to church, hold the Holy Bible, recite the holy Words, sing the holy songs, view the holy ongoing events on the calendar, and see all the Bible stories captured in the stained-glass windows. They, too, are close in every way to God—except in their hearts.

FRIDAY: Head Knowledge vs. Heart Knowledge

"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8, emphasis added).

Jesus had a lot to say about religious professionals. In the verse above, Jesus is saying about them, "In vain they get dressed in their outfits; in vain they splash blood on themselves; in vain they put the incense in; in vain they stand there as the offering animal is brought; in vain they worship Me." And then Jesus addresses the scribes whom He indicts for their "*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*."

All that exposure to God ended up only in their heads, not in their hearts. The spiritual skin of their lives, overexposed to the Light of God's Truth, had developed the deadliest cancer of all—spiritual indifference.

It was only one small point that made the two raindrops fall so close and end up so distant—these religious professionals were indifferent to God's Word. They were not looking for Jesus. The sad lesson of Christmas comes from those who were on the other side of the continental divide from Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Again, think of the dangerous place these religious leaders were in when summoned before King Herod (Matthew 2:4–5). The immediate reaction of the theologians of Herod's court who knew the Scriptures well was "*in Bethlehem*." They knew about the texts and this event, but didn't care enough to go five miles south of town and experience it. They pointed others to seek out the Savior, but never went to worship themselves. They knew the prophets, but did not believe the prophecies. They knew the Scriptures, but failed to take the words to heart. What a sobering warning that is for us this Christmas season.

They missed the Word. They dealt with God's Word, but God's Word was never allowed to deal with them: "... *These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men ...*" (Isaiah 29:13). They sang the songs at the festivals and feasts, and they quoted all the

passages that they were supposed to quote, but yet they were more worried about what others thought of them than fearing God who could see their hearts.

They missed the worship. The religious leaders were religious, but not worshipful. The religious leaders were acquainted with God, but they had never experienced Him. They had only learned to externally rend their clothes and go through the rituals: *So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm* (Joel 2:13). They were good at the outward emotions but lacked the inward worship. Although God actively seeks worship (John 4:24), He is very selective about who can worship Him—only those who have new hearts.

They missed the walk. The religious leaders were hearers, not doers; they were talkers, not walkers: *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage* (2 Peter 2:19).

They missed the witness. The religious leaders were self-righteous. They felt that they were good enough for God. Consequently, they thought: *God's Word isn't for me here and now. It is something out there in the future—or for someone else.* They knew about the texts, but failed to notice the significance of Christ's birth, so Jesus said to them: “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness*” (Matthew 23:27).

They missed it all! These men possessed only head knowledge. They lacked the heart knowledge that led to saving faith, for saving faith always changes a person from the inside out.

The chief priests and scribes are a lesson to us this Christmas to be vigilant so that we don't miss out on all God has for us!

SATURDAY: Is There Room in Your Heart for Jesus?

“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, emphasis added).

Zacharias and Elizabeth were looking for the first coming of Jesus, but the religious professionals weren't looking for Him at all. Zacharias and Elizabeth were ordinary people who faced the ordinary troubles, stresses, and pains of life that we do, but they made room in their hearts for Jesus. They kept their focus on His first coming.

That same continental divide, separators that determine destinations, still exists today. There are still two groups: one looking for the Second Coming of Jesus and the other that could not care less about Him. The ultimate outcome for each has monumental and eternal proportions: one is headed for God's new paradise and the other for the lake of fire.

So much superficial religious activity and externalism goes on at Christmas because people are close to God in every way but in their hearts, because that is a supernatural event associated

with the new birth—being born again. For that reason, the whole world can have the Christmas symbols around them, and the songs and great doctrine in the hymns, but still not get it.

God continues to seek those who will worship Him—those who are circumcised in their hearts. That is the New Covenant: *"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). Only those to whom God gives a new heart can truly worship Him this Christmas season.

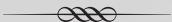
Make a choice to live in hope. Zacharias and Elizabeth embraced the Christ of Christmas, the Promised One, in their hearts. In faith, they believed that Jesus came to that manger one dark night to bear away the sin of the world—its penalty, debt, and stain. *That sacrifice for sin* is the only reason that you and I can have enduring hope for the end of days.

So choose to live in that hope this Christmas, because the Sunrise has come—He is here! Open your heart wide to Him. Jesus is the only key to the day that knows no night. As a possessor of the Light of the World, you no longer walk in darkness; you no longer need to fear the dark because you have the Sunrise from on High. What a joy to have that confidence and comfort this Christmas season!

Week 52—Wise Men Still Seek the King!

(Matthew 2:1–11 and Luke 2:8–20)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as
you become one of the King's seekers!



SUNDAY: When Life Is a Blur—Focus!

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! (Psalm 46:10, emphasis added).

Sometimes our lives fly by so fast that the days begin to blur. That is especially true at the holiday season. When that happens we can often miss the beauty around us. For example, as we drove back from taking our children to college, we went by the Great Smoky Mountain National Park on Interstate 40 in Tennessee. As we sped along we saw a sign that said: Scenic Parkway. Looking at Bonnie, I said, “Let’s try that!” Suddenly we were off the seventy-mile-per-hour river of cars and trucks jockeying for one car length over each other, and on a quiet winding road through the mist-covered Smoky Mountains.

Soon, even the children were crowded at the windows pointing out barns, fields, colored leaves, and waterfalls. *It is amazing what you can see when you slow down and look!*

How about it? Have you been looking for Jesus during this Christmas season? Or has Christmas already flown by the windows of your life so fast that you missed what God was offering you? Everyone who *looks* for Jesus to come will enjoy His arrival!

My prayer is that you will pull off the “rat race highways” and take the scenic route to enjoy Jesus Christ the Lord! One way to do that is to take a lingering look at the first coming of Christ, which is the greatest event since Creation. Therefore, we will spend another week on that all-important event.

When God came from heaven, wrapped in baby clothes, and laid in a stone feeding trough called a manger, He was only welcomed and worshiped by two groups of people outside of His own family. Those two groups, the wise men and the shepherds, were poles apart socially, economically,

culturally, ethnically, and in every other way but spiritually. However, when the wise men and the shepherds knelt at the feet of Jesus, they worshiped on common ground.

The wise men and the shepherds stand out at the first coming of Christ because, of all the creatures on earth created in His image, they were the only ones who came seeking the newborn King! Thus, I call them “the King’s seekers.”

What does Matthew 2 record as the reaction of these seekers of the King? Worship. Shortly after the birth of the Messiah, Judean shepherds bowed at His feet, singing His praises. Then later, Babylonian Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem asking King Herod where the *real* king of the Jews was born. As we discussed last week, the response of the Bible scholars of Herod’s court was “*in Bethlehem*.” The still startling fact is this: although they could recite the right answer, their hearts were indifferent to the truth of God’s Word. Their reaction revealed the terrible condition of indifference to God. They knew the Scriptures—they just did not believe them. What a tragic indictment upon these servants of God! They did not want to travel the five or so miles to Bethlehem to see their Messiah!

How far will you go to see the King? What is it costing you to serve Him?

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father in heaven, I thank You for the blessing of these wise men. I pray that we would each exhibit faith like the Magi. They were drawn by You, oh God. They were most likely instructed by Your Word, but it was a heartfelt response. It wasn’t academic like that of the religious leaders. It wasn’t hatred or indifference. It was love. For that is what You have told us—no one who loves You will ever miss out on seeing You. And that is true this Christmas season. I pray that we would pull off the highway onto the scenic parkway and in our hearts love You, come to You, see You, fall before You, and worship You. For then You will draw from us as we open to You what we have and give it to You. Oh, make this the most precious, worship-filled, Christ-exalting celebration of the Christmas season of our lives! We pray in the name of Jesus and for His glory. Amen.*

MONDAY: Wise Men Believe Christ—Sight Unseen

“... Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2, emphasis added).

What does Matthew record as the first response of those who found Jesus? Worship. As the Holy Scriptures pull back the cloak of time, with vibrant freshness, let us further consider this hallowed moment—the moment God entered time and space as an infant!

In Matthew 2:1–11 Scripture records three responses to Christ that are still present today: Herod hated Him, the leaders ignored Him, and the Magi loved Him. Because the Magi “came from far away” (v. 1), it shows that they had a single-minded devotion because they kept asking everyone where King Jesus was (v. 2). In verses 3–8 Matthew paints the drama of all the possible

detractors and how the wise men were not daunted in their mission by false seekers like Herod or the religious professionals. In verse 9 Matthew shows how they just kept following God's leading until they found what they were seeking—Jesus—the King of their worship. Their emotions in finding Jesus at last were revealed by their great anticipation (v. 10). Finally, the Magi fulfilled their purpose in coming so long and so far: they came to see Jesus, to worship Him, and to give to Him. When they ... *had come ... they saw ... fell down ... worshiped ... opened ... [and] presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh* (v. 11). The significance of these gifts is beautiful.

Gold speaks of Christ as the King of heaven, or His *Deity*, as a study of the tabernacle makes plain. **Frankincense** speaks of Christ's role as both our Great High Priest and the perfect Lamb of God, just as it gives forth its *perfume* only as it is brought into contact with fire. **Myrrh** speaks of Christ's sacrificial death as myrrh is only harvested after the tree is bruised with stripes cut into the bark. Resin that flows as a healing balm to the damaged bark of the tree's *suffering*, has always associated myrrh with the death and burial of our Lord.

Thus these wise men, by the gifts they presented to Him, expressed first, their faith in His Deity; second, their adoration of His sinless life; and third, their anticipation of His sacrifice of Himself for the sin of the world by His death.¹

What simple lessons can we draw from the wise men? God has servants in unexpected places; He gets glory from unexpected people; He is found only by hearts and not heads; finding God is costly; and true faith is unstoppable.

The Magi were willing to follow God's way anywhere in order to find the promised King and Savior. Are you seeking the King? If you want to seek and find Him, here is God's pattern for how to do that.

Come to Jesus personally. Do you see the lesson in the way these wise men gave? They did not send their gifts by another's hand; they brought them personally to Jesus. God wants you, in person, to come to Him. Undaunted by the long and arduous journey, they must have been astonished to find a mere baby in a stable. After the magnificence of King Herod's palace, and his overpowering presence, it is incredible that they fell down to worship Jesus as they did. Choosing to disobey Herod's demand that they reveal the location of Jesus indicates their faith. That choice could have cost them their lives. So, in every way, their lives were marked by a personal coming to Jesus.

Have you come personally to Jesus in prayer, worship, and adoration? Have you given *yourself* to Jesus this Christmas season? That is the first gift He wants (2 Corinthians 8:5)!

Give sacrificially of your time, freedom, and comfort for Jesus. From the two-year calculation of Herod's death warrant on the babies of the region, we can infer that it took many months for the Magi to travel to Jerusalem. Herod added some months on each end to cover any potential birth near that time. Back then it was difficult traveling 1,100 to 1,200 miles. From the regions of Babylon, Persia, or Media, they would have had to walk and ride across hot and arid deserts, through rivers, and cross over cold and dangerous mountain passes to get to Christ's

birthplace. Even today that journey would be very difficult and dangerous. What are you giving to Jesus that really costs you something?

Immediately present what you have to Jesus. The wise men brought prophetic gifts that pictured what Christ's earthly work was all about. They brought what they had in their lives as wealthy rulers. And that is what God wanted; that is why He chose them. When God chose you it was not to bring their kind of gifts but yours. Remember how the Lord accepts the gifts of each individual. None are the same; all are precious to Him.

Present what you have to Him today. Give Him your mind, and let Him fill it. Give Him your hands, and let Him guide and use them. Give Him your future, and let Him plan and direct your life. Give Him your treasures—He can store them and invest them in safe places that bring everlasting rewards!

Reverently offer your worship to Jesus. More than the coming and presentation of gifts is the greatest moment of all: they fell down and worshiped Him! Worship is a rare and easily lost atmosphere of devotion, adoration, sacrifice, and communion. Those wise men were overwhelmed at the sight of the One they had come so far to see, had waited so long to honor, and had paid so much to sacrifice their gifts upon. When at last they saw Him, they could do nothing less than fall down and worship Him!

As you end this year and start a new one, measure your personal worship temperature. To help you do that, consider William Temple's definition of worship: “[Worship is] to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, [Worship is] to feed the mind with the truth of God, [Worship is] to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, [Worship is] to open up the heart to the love of God, [Worship is] to devote the will to the purpose of God. (Emphasis added.)”²

TUESDAY: The Shepherds Were Wise Men

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:10, emphasis added).

Before the Magi ever arrived, who came first to the birthplace of the King? The first to arrive were men who were wise in the eyes of God, but in man's eyes they were the humblest, lowliest, and most unworthy of all who lived around Bethlehem—the shepherds. These humble men were of the least likely profession to see a King, and yet the shepherds were the most honored of all Christ's greeters and seekers. You see, God really loves and responds to humility! (That truth has shaped my whole outlook on life, on worship, on Bible study and, most of all, on prayer.)

Shepherds of the first century lived in a world that made it hard to make a living. They struggled and scraped along on minimum wages. In fact someone has described the first century like this: “Taxes were high; wages were low, hypocrisy was rampant; honesty was rare. Freedom was gone; Roman occupation was hard. The rich were getting richer; the poor were always struggling. Morality was ebbing; rebellion was brewing; cruelty was reigning.”³

Life for a shepherd was difficult at best. They experienced cold nights, long days, distant family, and rare friends. Also, sheep stank, and shepherds had to continually search for them because they wandered. Life was never restful and work was never done. But that was all part of what could be expected in a shepherd's life.

In the community at large, shepherds were at the low end of Jewish society. Away from the synagogue, absent from the temple, and defiled by dead animals, they were outcasts to the Jerusalem crowd. Unable to even be a witness to special events they seemed to almost be outside of the culture. But then everything changed.

God captivated the humble shepherds. On the hillsides of Bethlehem, under the stars, the angel's glorious announcement of Christ's birth left one band of shepherds stunned: "... *Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ... You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.*" And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*" (Luke 2:10-14).

That was an awesome, fearful moment! The first angel's glorious words would always echo in their hearts. And that blazing light of heaven, accompanied by the praises of those angelic multitudes, was captured forever in their minds. The shepherds rushed from the glowing skies over the fields and searched diligently until they found Jesus. I wonder this Christmas season: *Will you allow God to captivate you?*

God changed the humble shepherds. The scene they witnessed in the stable would forever change their lives—they had found Jesus, and they would never be the same again. In just a moment, everything they had ever heard about the Scriptures came alive: God, angels, heaven, Messiah, promises, and prophecies suddenly became real. I wonder this Christmas season: *Will you allow God to forever change you?*

God became near to the humble shepherds. Those endless sacrifices, countless lambs, myriads of offerings, innumerable sins, and promises of forgiveness became intensely personal. The ordinary sheep they watched and sold became the extraordinary pictures of God's mercy and grace. The temple they supplied now became the place where sacrifices for their sins were offered. At last all those mysteries, rites, and ceremonies made sense: they had found the promised Lamb of God! I wonder this Christmas season: *Will you allow God to become personal, real, and near to you?*

God started the humble shepherds down a new path. Up until that night of nights, their lives as shepherds had been monotonous and predictable. They were used to sheep, which varied little in their habits. They had walked so often down the same path that it soon became a rutted canyon. But now, with the advent of Christ, life took on a whole new meaning! Nothing would ever be the same again—even though sheep would still be helpless, dumb, and dirty! Because of Jesus, the shepherds' whole perspective on life had changed, and they had fresh hope. I wonder this Christmas season: *Will you allow God to start you down a new path, His pathway for your life?*

So then, a group of wise and patient men, who sat on the same hills their grandfathers had sat upon, were watching the stars and talking that night—and then God came down to earth. Wow!

WEDNESDAY: The Wise Humbly Seek the King

... Seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 4:29, emphasis added).

The shepherds remind us of how God comes to mankind. God is the seeker; He is the initiator; and He responds to those who humble themselves before Him. Humbly and wisely, the shepherds responded, willing to listen and obey, proving once more that God can use the most distant, defiled, and outcast. *God has chosen ... the base things of the world and the things which are despised ... that no flesh should glory in His presence. ... as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD"* (1 Corinthians 1:27–31).

The shepherds humbly came to God—just as they were. Instead of backing away with the excuse of lack of education, lack of clothing, or lack of standing, they welcomed God's message in wonder, in fear, in uncertainty, and in hope. There was no time to become someone else; God called them just as they were (Luke 2:8).

The shepherds humbly responded to God at once. When God spoke, they listened! They received the message and acted upon it immediately (Luke 2:15a). They did not doubt; they did not disagree; they did not question; and they did not hesitate. They just heard and responded, so they were thus the first to see Jesus. The shepherds had little knowledge, but great faith. Since Jesus would soon be moved by His parents, had they hesitated they would have missed Him. But their simple faith was richly rewarded. The journey that began in faith would end in joy!

The shepherds went against the tide of the crowd. In their day and time, they were not welcomed by others. They often heard, “Stay where you came from! Go away! We don’t like you! You smell!” They were outcasts, and were unwelcome in public. Yet they ignored public opinion and earnestly sought for Jesus: *They came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger* (Luke 2:16). They kept searching and never gave up, and when they found Him, they believed in Jesus.

The shepherds humbly told everyone the Good News: “... *They made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ... Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them*” (Luke 2:17, 20). Just like the rest of the New Testament would record, these shepherds went back to their old jobs—but *as new men*. If anyone is in Christ Jesus, he or she is a new creation; old things pass away, and all things become new (see 2 Corinthians 5:17)!

So how can we, like the shepherds, see Christ this Christmas season? By humbling ourselves just as they did!

The Greatest Plague on Earth—Pride: Most people have missed grasping the significance of the first coming of Christ because of pride. Wanting our own way instead of God's is how He described our pitiful condition as lost ones: *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 53:6).

Just as humility is the root of all virtue, so pride is the root of all sin. John MacArthur comments, “Pride is the sin of competing with God, and humility is the virtue of submitting to His supreme glory. We all tend to exaggerate our own good qualities and minimize the good qualities of others. Humility takes off our rose-colored glasses and allows us to see ourselves as we really are.”⁴

Pride is the ultimate sin. Pride is the supreme temptation from Satan, because pride is at the heart of his own evil nature. It was pride that caused Lucifer to challenge God and be cast out of heaven and ultimately into the lake of fire. Our only protection against pride, and our only source of humility, is a proper view of God.

James 4:6 tells us that “*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*” In verses 7–8, He then gives us the pathway to genuine humility: *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 ... and purify your hearts*

Humble yourself in the sight of God. Pride comes in many forms. We may be tempted to be proud of our abilities, possessions, education, social status, appearance, power, and even our biblical knowledge or religious accomplishments. All conflicts and troubles are rooted in pride. The source of every gossip, hurt feeling, church division, and departed “sheep” is pride. At the heart of every fight is pride. But throughout Scripture the Lord calls His people to humility. God therefore says, *Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips* (Proverbs 27:2; see also Proverbs 15:33; 22:4).

Humility begins with proper self-awareness—the virtue,” said Bernard of Clairvaux, “by which a man becomes conscious of his own unworthiness.” It begins with an honest, unadorned, un-retouched view of oneself.

Humility produces spiritual blessing. Just as every sin starts in pride, every virtue begins in humility. And just as pride is behind every conflict we have with other people and every problem of fellowship we have with the Lord, so humility is behind every harmonious human relationship, every spiritual success, and every moment of joyous fellowship with the Lord. Humility allows us to see ourselves as we are, because it shows us before God as He is.

What we all need today is to cultivate godly humility: *As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering* (Colossians 3:12, emphasis added; see also 1 Peter 5:5).

What are you wearing today? The righteous garment of humility, or the filthy rags of the proud?

THURSDAY: The Wise Humbly Serve the King

... *Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears"* (1 Samuel 3:10b, emphasis added).

Have you decided to be among those who are seeking the King this Christmas season? You can if you will come humbly like the shepherds. The shepherds were truly wise men! They represent the best of all God's Word about the rewards that come to those who seek and find the Lord. Will you experience the glad tidings of the gospel? Will you experience great joy? You can if you humbly choose to follow the pathway they followed!

Decide to listen to God when He speaks. Like the shepherds, tune your heart to listen and look for God while you are at work, at school, or at home. Remember that the eyes of the Lord are looking down for someone looking up and seeking God: *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him* (2 Chronicles 16:9a).

Decide to come to God just as you are. Recognize the doctrinal truth of the third stanza of this classic song: *Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve; Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*⁵ Ask Him to change you, melt you, mold you, fill you, and use you! Tell Him, "O Lamb of God I come just as I am—for you to fix." There is no time, no reason, and no ability to become someone else; God calls you just as you are so that He Himself can make you anew!

Decide to seek Jesus until you find Him—don't delay. Just as the shepherds would have missed that precious moment if they had waited, so the Lord says, "While you hear My voice—don't wait!" So respond to Him: *O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You ...!* (Psalm 63:1). Seek Him with your whole heart while He may still be found!

Like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, drop your net and follow Him. Like Peter, say, "I have left all behind to follow You!" Like Paul, say, "I count everything else as trash so I can have You." Like David, say, "One thing have I desired above all others, and that is You, O Lord."

Jesus tells us that the gate is narrow, and the road is hard. We must press into His kingdom. We must draw near to Him. We can't serve two masters—only One. As Joshua declared: *"Choose ... this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:15). For as Paul confessed, "For me, life is Christ—and death is only better because I am with Him" (see Philippians 1:21).

Decide to tell everyone the Good News. Be like those at Christ's Resurrection and at Pentecost—they couldn't stop telling the great news. They went everywhere and told everyone what He had done in their lives. In His power, you can do the same in our generation: *"Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life"* (Acts 5:20).

As this year is fast coming to an end, will you be among the wise who still seek the King? Will you serve Him like the humble but wise shepherds? Will you experience and share the glad tidings of the gospel with others? Will you experience great joy?

FRIDAY: The Wise Still Seek the King!

... He ... is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, ... to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen (1 Timothy 6:15–16, emphasis added)

The first coming of Christ is all about a holy God, Jesus, coming into the world to die for sinners. Holman Hunt, a famous artist, painted what has been called “Jesus at the Door of the Carpenter’s Shop in Nazareth.” In that painting, Jesus is depicted as a boy. Coming out of His dad’s shop, He is shown as going to the door to stretch.

“His limbs ... had grown cramped over the bench. He stands there in the doorway with arms outstretched, and behind him, on the wall, the setting sun throws His shadow, and it is the shadow of a cross. In the background stands Mary; as she sees that shadow there is the fear of coming tragedy in her eyes. Jesus came into the world to live for men, and, in the end, to die for men. He came to give for men his life and his death. Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for the One who was to die—these were the gifts of the wise men, and, even at the cradle of Christ, they foretold that He was to be **the true King, the perfect High Priest, and in the end the only Savior of mankind.** (Emphasis added.)”⁶

As we rejoice these days in the first coming of Christ, may we not be neglectful of rejoicing in the anticipation of His Second Coming as well. For this true King, this perfect High Priest, the only Savior of mankind, will return soon to take us home—and so shall we forever be with the Lord!

But if you are only *acquainted* with Him, and do not yet really *know Him*, you need to be mindful that the days of promised terror loom on the horizon. Christ’s description of these days includes people dying of heart failure because they witness such inescapable horrors. Thus, now is the time for the wise to seek the King—to flee to the safest spot in the universe—Jesus Christ!

Are you wisely learning to seek and find Him with all your heart? Are you learning to worship Him in the power of the Spirit and in the truth of His Word?

Make a choice to live in hope. Martin Luther, who experienced more intense and ongoing trials than most of us will ever experience, chose to live, come what may, in the enduring hope of our eternal refuge, Jesus Christ. Luther’s life testimony ended up impacting the world to this very day.

From what Luther said about the power of music, I believe that God ministered comfort and strength to his tried soul through music as well, for he said: “I am strongly persuaded that after theology there is no art than can be placed on a level with music; for besides theology, music is

the only art capable of affording peace and joy of the heart ... the devil flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God.”⁷

As these end times become increasingly more difficult and painful, remember Luther’s testimony. Like Luther, choose to live in enduring hope through basking in both the power of God’s Word and biblically-based music that exalts the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as you eagerly look forward to Christ’s soon return!

May you be strengthened, comforted, and encouraged by these excerpts of devotional comments by John MacArthur on Horatio Spafford’s lyrics to the timeless song, “It Is Well with My Soul.” I believe they embody what it means to possess living hope for the end of days.

John MacArthur writes: “The ... songwriter’s focus was on an objective spiritual reality that anchored him at all times—whether he was experiencing “peace, like a river” or whether billowing sorrow overwhelmed him [as when his four daughters drowned at sea]. In the midst of both emotional extremes, his heart and mind returned to the truth that kept him spiritually anchored—the promise that his soul was eternally safe from God’s judgment.

“... Spafford’s hope was in Christ, who ‘shed his own blood’ on the believer’s behalf. So when Spafford tasted the anguish of human sorrow, his mind turned to the infinite suffering that Christ had already borne on his behalf. That is why in circumstances when most men’s minds would have been consumed with self-pity and bitter emotions, Spafford wrote a gospel song of gratitude for Christ’s vicarious atonement.

“This song is a potent reminder of how every Christian should respond to the vicissitudes of life—particularly life’s heartaches. Whatever the source of our sorrows (‘Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come’), we can find a powerful comfort in knowing that Christ literally shed His own precious lifeblood for us [see Romans 8:31–32].

“... Although Spafford’s earthly sorrows were an excruciating burden for him, he knew those sorrows were temporary. And that temporal burden served as a poignant reminder that an even greater, eternal burden had been lifted from him by Christ, who took the full guilt of sin and carried that guilt to the cross. Thereby paying the full penalty for our sins, He canceled forever every claim that the law of God had against us. It was as if He took all the divine ordinances that demanded our condemnation and nailed them to the cross (Colossians 2:14). ‘O the bliss of this glorious thought!’

“The closing verse looks forward to the day when the Lord will consummate our redemption. Even our bodies will be redeemed, and everything good we have hoped for will be realized (‘the faith shall be sight’—cf. Romans 8:22–25). In the meantime—and even while we’re suffering unspeakable earthly grief—true believers in Christ can find sufficient comfort in knowing that all is eternally well with their souls.”⁸

It Is Well With My Soul

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And has shed his own blood for my soul.*

*My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought;
My sin not in part, but the whole
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, It is well with my soul.*

—*Horatio G. Spafford, 1828–1888*

SATURDAY: Come, Lord Jesus!

... Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ... (Hebrews 12:1b-2a, emphasis added).

The goal of the book of Revelation was to show us—who love and serve God—His Son, Jesus Christ. I hope that is what you have seen in this year-long devotional contemplation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

God the Father gave the Revelation of Jesus Christ—which shows Jesus in all His beauty—to be shared with us, His servants. In its pages God reveals that we shall forever be satisfied as we behold Him whom we love.

- Christ is **the key** to living hope.
- His Word is **the food** for living hope.
- His Spirit is **the power** for living hope.
- His presence is **the guard** for living hope.

Living hope comes down to you through Christ—who has done it all—so believe what He has said and receive His hope!

When we get to the end of everything—what is left? In other words, what will last forever? Revelation 22 ends with God, heaven, and one more element—***servants serving God*** (emphasis added).

Who are those surrounding God's Throne?

Revelation 22:3: And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (emphasis added).

Revelation 22:6, 9: Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God" (emphasis added).

All who love and serve God long to hear Christ say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master’s home!” A “Well done!” from Him will make this life on earth all worthwhile!

Through this book, *Living Hope for the End of Days*, we have had fifty-two weeks to learn how to live in hope, strength, joy, purpose, and peace! As you read through this entire book, you discovered 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 reaped a harvest of promised blessings!

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.

So how do we have this *Living Hope for the End of Days*? Only in Christ! To each of us, Jesus offers to be our *Living Hope* when we are unclean, when we are weary, when we are homeless, when we are helpless, when we are hopeless, and when we are tempted.

Christ is the closest, safest, and only *Living Hope* for us through all of life—to the very end!

Have you fled to the safest spot in the universe, the open arms of Jesus? If not, do so today. If you have, look around—Christ wants to be your moment-by-moment *Living Hope for the End of Days*!

... “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, ***come, Lord Jesus!*** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Revelation 22:20-21, emphasis added).

One Final Word...

The God who wrote the Scriptures wants everyone in the world to come to a personal relationship with Him through faith in His Son Jesus.

- Jesus told us that “*God so loved the [whole] world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16).
- The apostle Peter told us that *The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9 NASB).
- The Hebrew prophet Joel and the apostle Paul both told us that “**whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved**” (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13).

This is the good news—that despite war, terrorism, natural disasters, and all of man's inhumanity to man, God deeply loves us all. The big question is whether YOU are going to love Him back and follow His ways as explained to us in the Bible.

If you would like to meet the God of the Bible, He waits for you today. His plan as stated below and His open arms are yours to choose right now. I hope you will turn to Jesus today while you hear His voice ...

The Truth of the Matter

Every person needs to have a right relationship to God. Perhaps you in your own heart have tried to explain spiritual things away. Here are **seven keys** to help you find true Christian faith for yourself, based upon what God says in His Word—the Bible.

God Loves You

“... *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16 NIV).

You Are in Trouble

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ... You [God] are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell (Romans 3:23; Psalm 5:4 NIV).

Sin Brings Disaster

The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

God Has Provided the Answer—a Savior

God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8 NIV).

Repent of Your Sin and Trust the Savior

"Turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." ... To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (Acts 20:21 NIV; John 1:12 NIV).

Receiving the Savior by Faith Gives Eternal Life

This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:11-12 NIV).

Now Is the Time to Receive Him

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrew 3:7-8 NIV). Why not offer a simple prayer in faith, like this one:

"Lord Jesus, I am guilty of sin. You are the One who died in my place. I cry out to You now and ask for Your mercy. Forgive me, save me, and come to live within me. I love You and will follow You as best I can. Please change my heart in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen."

Your decision about the relationship you want to have with God is the most important decision you will ever make in your life. If you have asked for Christ's forgiveness today, please email us at www.dtbm.org. Tell us what God has done in your life, and we will be happy to send you a free CD on "**Getting Started in Your Walk with God.**"

NOTES

Week 1: Worship the Christ of Revelation

1. Adapted from “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus,” words and music by Helen H. Lemmel, © 1922, 1950 by Singspiration, Inc.
2. Adapted from the William Temple quote by Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live without God?* (Dallas: Word, 1994), p. 151.
3. Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper Books, 1998), p. 170.

Week 2: Knowing Christ’s Presence Today

1. Adapted from James Montgomery Boice’s *John Volume 3: Those Who Received Him, John 9–12* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999) pp. 785ff.
2. Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), p. 167.
3. Adapted from John Phillips, *100 New Testament Sermon Outlines* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), p. 100.
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5. Erwin Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 143.

Week 3: Signs That the End of Days Is Near

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2. Visit: www.worldnetdaily.com Technology—Club-Goers in Spain Get Implanted Chips for ID, Payment Purposes (April 14, 2004).

Week 4: Get Ready to Meet Jesus

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2. *The Omega Letter Intelligence Digest*, Vol. 20 Issue: 23, Friday, May 23, 2003, "Confessions of a Techno-Junkie," www.omegaletter.com.

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2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Shedding Light on Our Darker Side* (Fullerton, CA: IFL, 1998), pp. 100–101.
3. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 162–164, 170.
4. Eric Sauer, *Triumph of the Crucified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 95.
5. Robert Coleman, *Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1987), pp. 160–176.

Week 7: Find Hope in Christ's Majesty

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2. James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expositional Commentary: Volume 1—Psalms 1–41* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 106.
3. J. J. Steward Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms, 2 Volumes in 1* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989; Original edition 1878–1879), p. 1:181.
4. Lloyd-Jones, p.14.
5. Boice, p. 109
6. Ibid., p. 110
7. Lloyd-Jones, p. 19.
8. Ibid., p. 111.

Week 8: Look Into Christ's Eyes

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2. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 121.

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2. *The National Geographic*, July, 1993, pp. 83–103.

3. *The National Geographic*, June, 1950, pp. 809–828.

Week 10: See Christ's Face and Feel His Touch

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2. Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter: The Story of Peter Marshall* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), pp. 310–319.
3. See Preserved Smith, *Luther's Table Talk* (New York: Ames Press, 1907) for a critical study of the table talks.
4. Dwight L. Carlson, M.D., "Exposing the Myth that Christians Should Not Have Emotional Problems," *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998.

Week 11: Fear Not! For I Am with You

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Week 13: Hear Christ's Message

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Week 15: Experience Christ's Comfort

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Week 20: Heed Christ's Request

1. Copyright © 1922 by Singspiration Music/ASCAP, The Benson Company, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

Week 21: Adore Christ's Loveliness

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2. Reginald Heber, 1793–1826.
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4. Cited by R. Kent Hughes, *ACTS: The Church Afire* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1996), p. 50.
5. Adam Clark, *Clarke's Commentary: John* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, Inc., 1999), electronic edition, in loc.
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Week 22: See Christ in the Old Testament (Genesis to Daniel)

1. Sources used for the next three week's lessons are: *Wilmington's Visualized Study Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1984); *Baxter's Explore the Book*; Scroggie's *The Unfolding Drama*; *Christ in All the Scriptures*; *The Criswell Study Bible*; *Walk through the Bible*; Lehman Strauss' *The Compact Guide to the Bible*; C. H. Mackintosh's "Notes on the Pentateuch," *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, *First Edition in One Volume*, 1972, 6th printing 1989); John MacArthur's *Ashamed of the Gospel*, pp. 76–77; Oswald Sanders' *Spiritual Discipleship*, pp. 129–136.

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2. *Ibid.*
3. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), p. 204.
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Week 26: Understand Christ's Wrath

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Week 28: See Christ's Patience

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3. *Ibid.*
4. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/04/17/MNGONC93DQ1.DTL>

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6. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), #6960
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8. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), #3176.
9. Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 104.
10. Lindsey, *The Terminal Generation*, pp. 92–93.
11. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), #982.
12. Ibid., p. 95.
13. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), #2620.
14. F. Brown, et al., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford Press, 1907), p. 875.
15. Lindsey, *The Terminal Generation*, pp. 97–98.

Week 29: Watch Christ's Judgment

1. Charles H. Gabriel, pub. 1902, Copyright: Public Domain.
2. Carl F. H. Henry Commencement Address, n.p.
3. John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), pp. 128–130.

Week 30: Behold the Mystery of Jesus

1. Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, pp. 76–77.
2. Ibid.
3. W. Graham Scroggie, *Method in Prayer* (London: Pickering, 1955), pp. 17–18.

Week 31: Remember God's Plan of the Ages

1. These ideas are from Sir Robert Anderson's book *The Coming Prince*, where he noted these astounding numbers in 1894.
2. Adapted from Missler, "Daniel's 70 Weeks" <<http://www.khouse.org/articles/2004/552/>>.
3. Paraphrased from John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1983, 1985), in loc.

Week 32: Keep Christ's Perspective

1. Adapted from Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, in loc.

Week 33: Marvel at the Genuine Jesus

1. John Phillips, *Exploring The Future—A Comprehensive Guide to Bible Prophecy* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1992), pp. 227–228.
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Chruch—Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 357.
3. Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Dallas: Word, 1994), p. 23.
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1. Adapted from "The Paradox of Our Times" by Jeff Dixon, online May 1998.
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/soapbox/paradox.asp>.
2. William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, ©1976), in loc.
3. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life: Updated Edition* (Montville, NJ: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) electronic edition, chapter 17.

Week 36: Rejoice That You Have Christ

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2. John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 202.
3. Ray Stedman, *God's Final Word* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1991), p. 280.
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5. Ibid.
6. Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation: Outlined Studies* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1964), in loc.

Week 37: Understand the True Bride of Jesus

1. Paraphrased from Peter Kreeft's *Ecumenical Jihad* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), p. 100.
2. Ibid.
3. Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994). Also, Ray Stedman (287–297) says this chapter gives ten clues about the identity of the woman.
4. Paraphrased from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1780792.stm>.
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6. Harold Wilmington, *Wilmington's Guide to the Bible* (Chicago: Tyndale House, 1981), p. 536.
7. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Prophecy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1989), p. 133.

Week 38: Live for What Is Eternal

1. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1989), p. 55.
2. Adapted from William Barclay's *Revelation: Vol. 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, © 1976), p. 157.
3. Steve Farrar, *Better Homes and Jungles* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1977), pp. 189–190.

Week 39: Give All to God

1. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, electronic edition, n.p.
2. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1989), pp. 185–186.

Week 40: Giving God What Is His

1. An excerpt from *The Root of the Righteous* by A. W. Tozer, printed in *The Best of A. W. Tozer, Book Two*, compiled by Warren W. Wiersbe, (c) 1980 by Baker Book House Company.
2. J. Oswald Sanders, *Enjoying Intimacy with God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 151–158.
3. R. T. Kendall, *Tithing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 103.

Week 41: Living Contentedly for Jesus

1. Robert Kanigel, "Too Much of a Good Thing?" *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, 12 January 1998, p. 25.
2. Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), pp. 97–98.
3. Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined for the Throne: A New Look at the Bride of Christ* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), p. 53.
4. Swenson, pp. 123–133.
5. This section on the symptoms of overload was adapted and quotations taken from Dr. Swenson's *The Overload Syndrome* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), pp. 83–87.
6. Dr. J. Grant Howard, *Balancing Life's Demands*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1983), p. 144.

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9. John Bertram Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (London: G. Bles, 1958), Matthew 5:1–8.
10. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor books, 1997), in loc.
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13. *The MacArthur Study Bible*, p. 939.
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15. Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1897), p. 24.
16. Adapted from V. Raymond Edman's *The Disciplines of Life* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1948), p. 83.
17. The following pamphlets are available from Chapel of the Air: #7245, *Getting Ready for Sunday* by David and Karen Mains; #7451, *Rules for the Sunday Search* by David R. Mains; #7462, *The Sunday Search: A Guide to Better Church Experiences* by Steve Bell.
18. R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), pp. 109–115.
19. Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), p. 28.
20. Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 40–41.
21. R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), pp. 82–84.
22. Steve Farrar, *Better Homes and Jungles* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1977), pp. 189–190.

Week 42: Look for the Returning Jesus

1. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), #1401
2. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), #7706
3. Adapted from Matthew 22, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), in loc.

Week 43: Rest in the Vengeance of Jesus

1. Copyright © 1978 Maranatha! Music
2. F. B. Meyer, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), p. 133.

Week 44: Look for Paradise on Earth

1. These are the headlines of Revelation 20 through the eyes of John Phillips, a noted Bible teacher, as he blends dozens of OT prophecies into a picture for us in *Exploring Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 2005), p. 251.
2. Phillips, p. 253.
3. Erich Sauer, *The Triumph of the Crucified* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 154–165.

4. Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997).

Week 45: Fear the Holiness of Jesus

1. How many people are we talking about? Some have calculated that there have been up to 40 billion souls who have lived on earth. In a one-hour judgment, 40+ billion people would take over 5 million years! After the Flood until Christ's day, Noah and his family (eight people) produced a population of just over 100 million people. From the time of Christ to George Washington's death (1,800 years later) the population rose to 1 billion; by 1930, which was 130 years later, we arrived at 2 billion; 45 years after that (1975) we doubled to 4 billion. TODAY (2006) we have over 6½ billion souls. At the present rate of growth, in less than 25 years we will be at 10 billion. (*TIME*-1/2/89 pp. 26, 48). This growth is despite 4,000 children dying of starvation daily, plus 1,000 each day lost in various wars, plus the death factor of all who die of natural causes each day.

2. During the next two days, the text has been adapted, paraphrased, and quoted from: John Thomas, "That Hideous Doctrine," *Moody Magazine*, September 1985.

3. Ibid.

Week 46: Taste the Joys of Heaven

1. Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), p. 320.
2. Ray Vander Laan, *That the World May Know: Set 4 Leaders Guide for Faith Lessons 19–27* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 1997), p. 2.
3. The following is adapted, drawn, and quoted from Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, © 1998).
4. John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), p.21.
5. Erwin W. Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 46.
6. <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/secrets/3123.html>.
7. Lutzer, p. 62.
8. Ibid., p. 67.
9. Ibid., adapted slightly from pp. 62–67.
10. http://www.bible.org/illus.asp?topic_id=593
11. "Heaven," author unknown, in *Poems That Live Forever*, comp. Hazel Felleman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 331. A version of this poem has also appeared under the title "The Homeland," attributed to Myrtle Erickson in Knight's *Master Book of New Illustrations*, comp. Walter B. Knight (1956; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). p. 279.

Week 47: Discover Our Marriage to Jesus

1. J. Oswald Sanders, *HEAVEN: BETTER BY FAR*, (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1993), p. 148

2. Adapted from Jan David Hettinga's *Follow Me* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), pp. 83, 189, 190–194.
3. William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2, Chapters 11–18, Revised Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000, © 1975), electronic edition, in loc.
4. Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), pp. 66–71.
5. Ibid., p. 28; format adapted for readability.

Week 48: Behold the Wonders of Jesus

1. W. Graham Scroggie, *Know Your Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965), pp. 362–375.
2. On the second of the six days during which God created the universe, He created the heavens (Gen. 1:6–8), and on the third day He created the earth (Gen. 1:9–10). The divine commentary on all that God created is this: “And God saw everything that He made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). But soon Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and because of that disobedience, a curse was placed on man and that domain of heaven, earth, and the sea over which he was authorized to reign (Gen. 1:28). The heaven and earth which were created “very good” now became very bad.
3. Adapted from Erwin W. Lutzer’s *How You Can Be Sure That You Will Spend Eternity With God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), pp. 112–121.
4. This list was adapted from Erwin W. Lutzer’s *Your Eternal Reward* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), pp. 87–100.
5. Ibid., p. 100.
6. Anne Cousin’s hymn called “Emmanuel’s Land.”
7. Jennie E. Hussey, 1921
8. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Revell, 1929), pp. 64–65.

Week 49: Fall in Love with Jesus All Over Again

1. Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe’s comments on Revelation 22 in *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1997), in loc.
2. Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Tyndale House, 1983), electronic edition, in loc.
3. Wiersbe, in loc.
4. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), electronic edition, in loc.

Week 50: Experience Jesus Often

1. Joni Eareckson Tada et al., *When Morning Gilds the Skies* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), pp. 22–25.

Week 51: The First Coming of Jesus

1. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), electronic edition, in loc.

Week 52: Wise Men Still Seek the King!

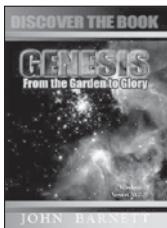
1. Adapted from A. P. Gibbs's *Worship* (Kansas City, MO: Walterick Publishing, 1950), p. 45.
2. Adapted from the William Temple quote by Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live without God?* (Dallas: Word, 1994), p. 151.
3. Author unknown.
4. John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians 4* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), electronic edition, in loc.
5. Charlotte Elliott, 1789–1871.
6. Paraphrased and quoted from William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1 Chapters 1–10, Revised Edition* (Louisville: Westminster Press; 2000, © 1975), electronic edition, in loc.
7. Paraphrased and quoted from William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1 Chapters 1–10, Revised Edition* (Louisville: Westminster Press; 2000, © 1975), electronic edition, in loc.
8. Cited in *Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville: Paragon Associates, 1976).
9. Joni Eareckson Tada et al., *O Worship the King* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), pp. 27–29.

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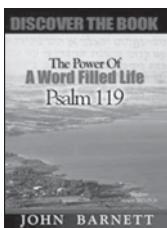
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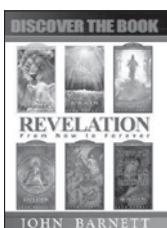
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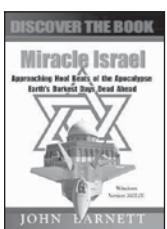
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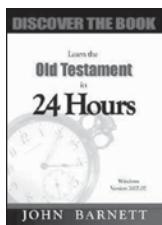
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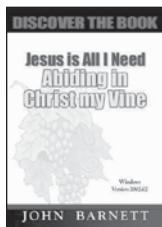
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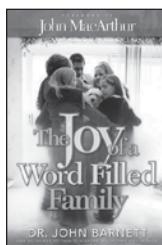
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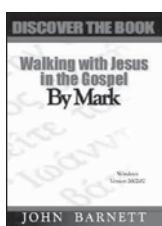
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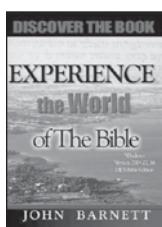
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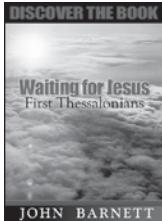
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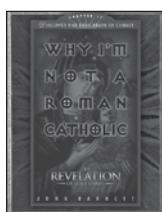
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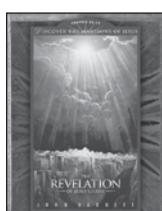
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