

Behold the Mystery of Jesus

LHC: Message Thirty (980719AM)

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 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.

—Revelation 10:1

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 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.

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 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 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** (Revelation 10:1, 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 **a 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, John is given the mystery of God’s plan. 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, reprovved 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, Suffring 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)

¹ Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 76–77.

² *Ibid.*

³ W. Graham Scroggie, *Method in Prayer* (London: Pickering, 1955), pp. 17–18.