



Days of Praise

September ♦ October ♦ November 2022

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

September • October • November 2022

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

(Psalm 16:11)

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the King James Version of the Bible.

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

*“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps....Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again.”
(1 Peter 2:21, 23)*

Dear Christian friend,

Thank you for meeting together with us as we reflect on the fall quarter’s devotional thoughts. For many folks, fall is the Goldilocks time of year—not too hot, not too cold, and the rain is just right...all accented by a beautiful splash of color!

The Lord Jesus is our perfect role model in everything. We’re warned about days when people will be “false accusers, incontinent, fierce” (2 Timothy 3:3). Sounds like today. We’re tempted to hit back. It’s hard to absorb mistreatment and not retaliate. Yet, Jesus was slandered, beaten, and treated more unfairly than anyone. In return, He gave love and forgiveness. With His enablement, we’ll work to follow in His footsteps.

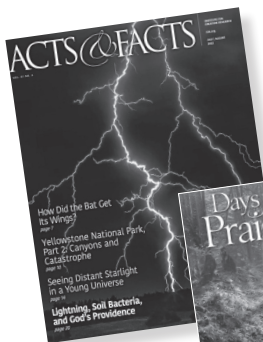
It’s my prayer that the Holy Spirit will use each one of these short devotionals to help you fall deeper in love with the Lord Jesus and our good heavenly Father.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

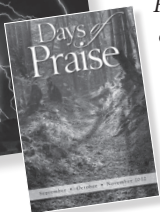
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Thursday, September 1

A True Slave of Christ

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

In His final earthly days, our precious Lord boldly journeyed toward Jerusalem to that “beautiful awful cross.” This was set against the trembling fear of His disciples (Mark 10:32). He confided to them the upcoming tragic events of His last days. He would “be delivered unto the chief priests...and they shall condemn him to death...and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again” (vv. 33-34).

Although the Master Servant demonstrated selfless boldness on His approaching suffering, James and John demanded that the Lord serve them and grant them dual thrones in glory, one on His right and one on His left (vv. 35-40).

Our Lord’s response was directed to all who are “in Christ.” We must take up that same cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). Jesus called us slaves of the Kingdom, and said, “Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant [Greek *doulos*, lowest male slave] of all” (Mark 10:43-44). Jesus came to serve and to pay on the cross the purchase price for our redemption. His life and death serve as an example for believers to follow.

What is our attitude toward those who are spiritually bankrupt and in desperate need of the gospel? Do we intentionally serve those whom God providentially brings into our lives, or do we demand service? Like our Lord, are we interruptible, willing to lay aside the busyness of our all-important schedules to serve even the lowliest person in need?

Jesus did! CM

Friday, September 2

Life—Light—Love

“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” (John 1:3-5)

The apostle John, designated as “the other disciple, whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2), used the concept of *agape* love more than any other New Testament writer, even teaching that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Likewise, John tells us that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), and he uses the concept of light (*phos*) more than any other writer.

In just the same way, he uses the primary word for life (*zoe*) more than any other writer and discusses “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1), identifying Christ as life and the fountain of life.

Christ, of course, has existed “from the beginning” and is the Creator of physical life on Earth (Colossians 1:16; Acts 17:28). But in a special way, He is “the life” (John 14:6), and, as we see in our text, “in him was life,” denoting salvation and eternal life based on His own atonement for sin.

Concerning light, Christ not only created physical light (Genesis 1:3) and later light sources (Genesis 1:14), but He is light, referring to revelation of the things of God to men, for His “life was the light of men.”

But most of all, “God is love.” The first time John mentions *agape* love, we are told that “God so loved the world” and that His free and undeserved love drove Him to give “his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Herein is love...that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). JDM

Saturday, September 3

The River of God

“Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it.” (Psalm 65:9)

The inexhaustible river of God, watering the whole earth, is nothing less than the refreshing rains coming down from the heavens, “visiting” the earth on its amazing journey to the oceans, whence it flows back up to the skies again. This river incorporates all the rivers of Earth, yet it is like no other river, for once it reaches the ocean, it rises into the heavens, there to flow back over the thirsty ground and finally descend once more on its endless journey.

What a wonderful provision is this river of God! Without it, all life on Earth would soon die. Far more valuable than gold, it continually “enriches” the earth on its regular visitations “to satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth” (Job 38:27).

Thereby does God also prepare corn to feed man and beast. The word “corn” in this and other passages probably refers generically to any of the cereal grains that provide the basic foodstuffs for people and animals all over the world. This is implied in the creation passage itself. “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth....And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat” (Genesis 1:29-30).

This is God’s wonderful life-giving river. “He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth” (Psalm 104:13-14). The Creator is also the Sustainer (Colossians 1:16-17). HMM

Sunday, September 4

How to Respond to Defamation

“Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day.” (1 Corinthians 4:11-13)

Bible-believing Christians today, especially creationists, have become the object of intense vilification by the news media and by self-appointed spokesmen for the scientific and educational establishments. The natural reaction is to respond in kind.

But this is not the spiritual reaction. “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:21-23).

We not only have Christ’s example before us but also His direct commandment. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake....Love your enemies, bless them that curse you” (Matthew 5:11, 44).

The apostles endured far more insults and opprobrium for Christ’s sake than any of us shall ever have to suffer. Yet Paul, speaking for them all, could say, in effect, “Being reviled, we bless; being defamed, we entreat, even though they call us the filth of the world!”

We can trust the Lord to take care of our reputations, for He is more concerned even than we, and His Word tells us: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). HMM

Monday, September 5

Man and His Labor

“Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.” (Psalm 104:23)

The 104th Psalm is a beautiful psalm of creation and the Flood, supplemented by God’s providential care of His creatures in the post-Flood world. Our text makes man’s activity seem almost incidental in the grand scope of God’s activities on behalf of His whole creation.

Nevertheless, it reminds us of God’s first great commission to mankind concerning that creation. “Have dominion... over all the earth...to dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 1:26; 2:15). This primeval mandate, though still in effect as man’s stewardship responsibility for the earth and its creatures, has been seriously impacted by sin and the curse. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake,” God told Adam; “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:17, 19).

And so it is that men and women must work, and the work often is laborious, stressful, and unappreciated. Yet, the divine rule is “that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands...That ye may walk honestly...and that ye may have lack of nothing” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). “For... if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Thus, labor is necessary, even for those who don’t know the Lord. But it is far better if we work not just to earn a living but to please the Lord. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Colossians 3:23).

Whatever our job is (assuming it is honorable), it can be regarded as serving Christ and helping to fulfill His primeval dominion commandment, and even as helping to lead others to know Him. Therefore, whether the work is easy or hard, we should be “always abounding in the work of the Lord...your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). HMM

Tuesday, September 6

The Father Testifies of the Son

“Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” (John 12:28)

This is the last of three remarkable occasions during the earthly ministry of Christ when God the Father spoke directly from heaven concerning His only begotten Son. The first was at His baptism. “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17; also Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). This thrice-recorded testimony was given primarily to the forerunner, John the Baptist, who said, “And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:33).

The second was to three chosen disciples at the transfiguration. “Behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:5). Years later Peter recalled, “This voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Peter 1:18).

Finally, the Father spoke in the words of our text for the day in direct response to the prayer of His Son at the beginning of the final week before His crucifixion. The message was to His Son but for the people. Jesus said, “This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes” (John 12:30) as He spoke of His imminent death on the cross.

When God spoke from heaven, the message was to assure and encourage His own dear ones: John, the disciples, and Jesus Himself. But it has also become an exhortation to all people for all time. Jesus Christ is God’s Son, and God is glorified in Him. Hear Him! HMM

Wednesday, September 7

Preaching Against False Teachers

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)

Jude, an earthly brother of our Lord, had become a leader in the early church by the time he wrote his epistle. He had intended “to write unto you of the common salvation” but instead was compelled by God’s Spirit to write and “exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3) against the onslaught of false teachers. He writes “to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude 1:15).

Few categories of people are so summarily denounced in Scripture as false teachers, those who teach error from within. Nearly every biblical writer echoes God’s hatred of them and their work. Here, Jude refers to Enoch’s ancient teaching to demonstrate the fact that God has always hated false teachers and has warned them of their doom. Unfortunately, many of today’s pulpits and “Christian” airwaves are filled with false teachers and their teaching, leading many astray.

But this is also a lesson to be learned by any who would teach, even born-again, God-gifted teachers. Error is a serious thing in God’s eyes, and a Bible teacher must continually submit to God’s Word and Spirit to discern and teach only truth. Evidently, it would be better for those teachers, seminarians, and others who espouse errors such as humanism, evolution, and other false concepts that a millstone were hung about their necks and that they drowned in the depth of the sea than to lead astray those “little ones” in their influence. JDM

The Three Appearings of Christ

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4)

The wonderful promise of this text actually refers to the third appearing of Christ. The New Testament speaks of His past appearing, His present appearing, and His future appearing. These three appearings are all set forth in one fascinating passage of Scripture, Hebrews 9:24-28, where three different Greek words are used in reference to the three appearings.

1. *His past appearing.* “Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). Here the Greek word is *phaneroo*, meaning “become apparent after being hidden.” His appearing had been prophesied since the beginning of the world (Luke 1:67-70), and finally He had come.

2. *His present appearing.* “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24). The Greek word here is *emphanizo*, which means “manifest or declare openly.” He is now our “advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1), where He “also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34).

3. *His future appearing.* “Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). The Greek in this case is *optomai*, meaning “gaze at face to face.”

Our text (Colossians 3:4) speaks of His future appearing at the Second Coming. However, here the Greek for “appear” is again *phaneroo*, the same word used for His past appearing in Hebrews 9:26, as discussed above. This usage assures us that His future appearing will be just as real to us as His past appearing was to His first disciples. And when He shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory! HMM

Friday, September 9

By Man Came Death

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

These verses, coupled with others throughout the Old and New Testaments, teach a very important principle not fully appreciated by those Christians who would hold that man evolved from lower animals or even that his tenure on Earth was preceded by millions of years. For if the earth is old, then death is part of the natural order of things, and billions upon billions of organisms have lived and died, struggling for existence, surviving only if they were “fit.”

Taken at face value, however, the Bible indicates a far different scenario. Evidently, at the beginning, all living creatures (i.e., conscious life as opposed to plants and non-conscious “animals”) were created to live forever. There was no death, for all were designed to be vegetarian (Genesis 1:30). God had warned them of disobedience to His one command: “For in the day that thou eatest thereof [i.e., of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] thou shalt surely die” (or more literally, “dying thou shalt die”) (Genesis 2:17). All of creation was placed under the curse of death at that time, the animals (3:14), the plants (v. 18), the ground (v. 17), and mankind (vv. 15-17, 19); all would be dying. Sadly, as we know all too well, this situation continues today (see Romans 8:22).

But if death is a part of the created order, what can our text mean? Furthermore, if death was not specified as the penalty for sin, what does the death of Christ mean? Belief in the concept of the old earth destroys vital doctrines, including our redemption through Christ’s death.

Thankfully, the reign of death and the curse will end one day (Revelation 21:4; 22:3) as God restores the creation to its intended state. JDM

Saturday, September 10

Earnest of the Spirit

“Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.”
(2 Corinthians 5:5)

This is a fascinating concept and a wonderful reality. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is said to be an “earnest”—that is, a pledge or deposit—on an ultimate fulfillment of a magnificent promise from God Himself. The word translated “earnest” (Greek *arrhabon*) is essentially a transliteration of its Hebrew equivalent (*arabawn*), translated “pledge” in the Old Testament (see Genesis 38:17-20).

Now if the guiding presence of God, through the Holy Spirit, is merely an earnest payment, the fulfillment must be glorious beyond comprehension. This “selfsame thing,” as our text calls it, is a wonderful “house which is from heaven,” the spiritual body we shall receive when we go to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-2).

The phrase also occurs in 2 Corinthians 1:22: “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” In context, the earnest payment here is associated with the “sealing” of God and the assurance that “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” (v. 20).

The third and last use of this word in the New Testament is in Ephesians 1:13-14: “In whom also trusted...after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” We are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), and He is to inherit all things.

Thus, the Holy Spirit, a present possession of all who have received Christ as Savior, is also God’s pledge of a glorious future—a perfect body, a great inheritance, and the certain fulfillment of all of God’s gracious promises. HMM

Sunday, September 11

Deliverance from Fear

“I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.” (Psalm 34:4)

There are many things in such a world as ours that can bring fear into human hearts—fear of want, fear of war, fear of rejection, fear of the dark, and a multitude of others. Some fears are rational, some are foolish, but all are very serious to those who experience them.

The good news of the gospel, however, can set us free from every fear. Remember that fear entered the world when sin entered the world. “I was afraid,” Adam explained when God found him hiding in the garden after eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:10). The second reference to fear in the Bible, on the other hand, was when “the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1). The Lord protects us and provides for us; we have His Word and need “fear no evil” (Psalm 23:4).

At least 19 times in the New Testament we hear the words “fear not” or “be not afraid” on the lips of Christ. Whenever phobias beset us or fears discourage us, deliverance is ours when we seek the Lord. Then “we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6). Even if we must sometimes “suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Peter 3:14).

Perhaps the greatest fear of all is the fear of death, but the Lord delivers us even from this fear, for He has conquered death. In His glorified body, He has said, “Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:17-18). HMM

Monday, September 12

Those Who Depart

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” (1 John 2:19)

One of the most hurtful experiences in the life of a Bible-believing fellowship is when an ostensibly Christian leader, teacher, or pastor decides to abandon his faith and even to teach against it. This sort of thing does happen all too often, and it obviously raises difficult questions.

Can a true believer, a teacher of the Word, a soul-winner, actually lose his salvation? Can a born-again Christian go back and be unborn? Can one who has received everlasting life through faith in Christ not really have eternal life?

If so, what about the many promises that have assured us that “ye may *know* that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13) and that we “shall never perish” (John 10:28)?

The answer to this vexing question is apparently in our text verse above. When such people, who once seemed to be genuine Christians, become apostates, denouncing the truth they once taught, it is because “they were not of us” at all, no matter what they professed at one time.

This fact implies a sober warning. When professing Christians fall away, assuming they have truly understood the facts and evidences of the Christian faith, it is impossible “to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:6).

How important it is, therefore, for all professing believers to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). We must be “rooted and built up in him” (Colossians 2:7), “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). HMM

Tuesday, September 13

Dark Sayings of Old

“I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.” (Psalm 78:2-3)

Most people do not think of parables—especially the parables of Christ—as dark (i.e., hidden) sayings but rather as figurative illustrations to help people comprehend some spiritual teaching. But Christ used parables to *conceal* truth, not to *reveal* truth! “Therefore speak I to them in parables,” He said in response to the disciples’ question as to why He was speaking in parables, “because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matthew 13:13). The principle is this: a person must first believe and obey the light he has already received before God will give him further light. “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (v. 12).

Thus, the parables of both Old and New Testaments are not of any obvious interpretation. They require study, meditation, and obedience to comprehend, but then they bring great blessing. “Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (v. 52).

The “dark sayings” of Scripture are not to be associated with occultism or darkness, of course. The word in Greek simply means something hidden from the world but transparent to eyes of faith and love. “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery....Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory....But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:7-8, 10). HMM

Wednesday, September 14

Who Gets Weary?

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.” (Isaiah 40:28)

Everyone gets weary, and everyone must rest. Even in Eden before sin came into the world there was a weekly day of rest, and each day of work in the Garden was followed by a night of rest in sleep. The Lord Jesus Christ, in the days of His sinless human flesh, occasionally became “wearyed with his journey” (John 4:6) and had to rest. On one occasion, He was so weary that during a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee He was “asleep on a pillow” (Mark 4:38) while the disciples tried to keep their ship from destruction. He once advised these fretful and busy disciples to “come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). We sometimes need to come apart before we fall apart!

In the New Jerusalem, with our new bodies, we perhaps will not need rest and sleep, for “there shall be no night there” (Revelation 22:5). In our present frail tents of clay, however, we do need rest, for God made us so. In one area of life, on the other hand, we are *twice* admonished to “not be weary in well doing” (Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13).

And when we do get weary and perhaps are not yet able to stop and rest, we can draw on God’s strength, for He “fainteth not, neither is weary.” “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4). “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:30-31). HMM

Thursday, September 15

Life in Christ

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4)

A host of biochemists and other scientists have tried for over a century to determine how life evolved from non-life. Such a quest is absurdly impossible, for the simplest imaginary self-replicating system would be infinitely more complex than the most elaborate machine ever designed by man. Life can come only from life. The first human life, indeed the first living system of any kind, could only have come by special creation from the *living* God. “For I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14).

Thus, “in him we live, and move, and have our being,” and He is “not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:28, 27). The Lord Jesus Christ is the one “by whom also he made the worlds” and who now is “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:2-3). The beating of our hearts, the breathing of our lungs, the very atoms of our bodies are continually sustained by Him. Were He to withdraw His power for a moment, life would cease, and all light would become darkness. Even those who reject Him and blaspheme His name owe their very existence to His power and grace.

“As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). Life is “in him”; He alone can conquer death and raise the dead. “As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will” (v. 21), for as “the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Thus, “he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). Through faith in His sacrificial death and resurrection life, “ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Henceforth is Christ Himself “our life” (Colossians 3:3-4). HMM

Fruitless Trees and Fruitless Lives

“He was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.”
(Mark 11:12-14)

Many detractors of our Lord have pointed with glee to what on the surface seems like a fit of petty anger on Christ’s part, spawned by His selfish appetite. In reality, it was probably unrealistic to expect figs at that time of year, a fact that He must have known quite well.

Perhaps the key to the whole passage is in the fact that “his disciples heard it.” When we look at the surrounding passages, we see that Christ was using the barren fig tree to teach His disciples something they desperately needed to know. This might be called a living parable.

Our Lord had just come from His triumphal entry into the city, having been proclaimed as King by the multitude (vv. 7-11), knowing their shallow adoration would soon turn into cries for His death. Leaving the fig tree, he drove the money changers from the temple grounds, having recognized that they were not only exploiting all the Jews who entered but had taken over the court of the Gentiles, using it as a shortcut through town (v. 16) and a place of business (v. 15), thus denying the possibility of true worship to all, both Jews and Gentiles.

The fig tree was an object lesson on barrenness, typifying the Jewish nation’s condition in spite of their privileged heritage. This type of hypocritical fruitlessness receives condemnation (vv. 20-21), exhibits a lack of faith (vv. 22-23), and hinders our prayers (vv. 24-26).

Our desire must be to bear much fruit in our worship, in our faith, in our prayers, and in our lives. JDM

Saturday, September 17

That Which Endures Forever

“But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment.” (Psalm 9:7)

This world will eventually pass away. The law of entropy assures us, in fact, that everything decays and dies. Atheistic scientists have even calculated that the very protons of which matter is composed will eventually disintegrate. And the Bible itself also tells us that the present earth and heaven “shall wax old as doth a garment” and “shall perish” (Hebrews 1:11).

But God Himself is eternal! As our text confirms (and many other texts agree), “the LORD shall endure for ever.” And that is not all! His glory will remain! “The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works” (Psalm 104:31). And His great name will never change. “His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him” (Psalm 72:17). That also means that His righteousness will never change. “His righteousness endureth for ever” (Psalm 112:3).

Then also “his mercy endureth for ever.” All 26 verses of Psalm 136 end with this wonderful assurance, and the same promise occurs 16 other times as well. If God’s perfect righteousness will last forever, then His great mercy must also endure forever, and we shall continue to thank Him for His everlasting mercy in all the ages to come.

Next, God’s Word will endure. “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25).

Finally, because God is forever, we also shall live forever. “His seed shall endure for ever” (Psalm 89:36). “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17). HMM

Sunday, September 18

Never Like This

“And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.”
(Matthew 9:33)

In His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus was fully human (except that He did no sin). He probably looked and acted very “average,” yet He continually performed works of healing and other miracles that were utterly different from those magical deeds attributed to the many conjurers of the day. When the man “sick of the palsy” was instantaneously and completely cured, he “went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion” (Mark 2:12). It was no wonder that Nicodemus, Israel’s greatest teacher at the time, acknowledged to Jesus that “no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

It was the same with His teachings. When officers were sent to arrest Him because of these teachings, they came back empty-handed, reporting simply that “never man spake like this man” (John 7:46).

His words and deeds were uniquely from God, and those who saw and heard Him should have known this. It was appropriate that when the time came for Him to fulfill Zechariah’s prophecy concerning the coming of Israel’s King, entering Jerusalem on a donkey, He had to “find a colt tied, whereon never man sat” (Mark 11:2) to serve as His kingly chariot. Others before Him had come into the city on donkeys but never like this, on an unbroken colt.

And when He died, He had to be buried in “a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid” (John 19:41). His birth was different, as were His life and death and burial, from those of other men, and “there is none other name...whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). HMM

Monday, September 19

Blind Hearts

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” (Ephesians 4:18)

It is a tragedy for a person to have blinded eyes but infinitely worse to have a blinded heart. No one ever willfully chooses to be sightless, but spiritual blindness is a product of the human will.

After Christ had given sight to the man born blind, the Pharisees still refused to believe, so Jesus said to them, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind....If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:39, 41).

Like these ancient intellectuals, it often seems that modern intellectuals are incurably blind. They profess to teach science and philosophy of the highest complexity, but their understanding is darkened, and their hearts are blinded when it comes to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul says: “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Even very religious people, people who believe in God as Creator, may blind themselves when confronted with the truth that the Creator must also become their Savior. “But their minds were blinded...even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart” (2 Corinthians 3:14-15).

Nevertheless, Christ came as “the light,” and when anyone will simply in faith “turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:16), and the gospel will “shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4). HMM

Tuesday, September 20

The House of the Lord

“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.” (Psalm 27:4)

The theme of the house of God is prominent in the book of Psalms. The phrase “the house of the LORD” occurs seven times, plus once each for “the LORD house” and “the house of the LORD our God.” There are three references to “the house of God,” one to “the house of my God,” and one to “the house of our God.” Then, “thy house” is mentioned 11 times, making a total of at least 25 explicit references to the house of the Lord in the book of Psalms alone.

Many of these passages refer, of course, to the actual temple in Jerusalem. On the other hand, since it was in the temple’s holy place that the Shekinah glory dwelled and where the high priest met once each year with God on behalf of the people, there naturally follows a personal metaphorical application with the house of the Lord referring to the spiritual presence of the Lord in the life of each believer.

In our text, the psalmist expresses as his highest desire that of continually dwelling in God’s presence all the days of his life. A number of the other references express the same holy desire, and the New Testament response is that, indeed, “ye are the temple of God, and...the Spirit of God dwelleth in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

It is wonderful to “dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,” but that is not all we can look forward to. The glorious concluding assurance of the 23rd Psalm is even greater. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:6). HMM

Wednesday, September 21

Promised in Writing

*“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”
(Romans 8:32)*

For those of us who have trusted God for salvation, based on the finished work of Christ on the cross, God has already done for us the most difficult and costly thing He could ever do. He graciously sent His only Son to Earth and then to the cross and the grave in order to make forgiveness and eternal fellowship with us possible. We are now adopted children in His family, joint-heirs with His beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17, 29, etc.), from whom we will never be separated (vv. 35-39), “whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (v. 15).

Consider our state when all this was being done for us. It is easy to love a beautiful baby who needs someone to care for it; but we were not at all attractive. We were filthy sinners, born in sin and habitually choosing to offend God’s holy nature by succumbing to “the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). Furthermore, we were even “enemies” of the cross at the time “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). Outside of His eyes of love and grace, we would have appeared more like a repulsive maggot than a beautiful baby.

It stands to reason that He who has already done the most difficult, yea, infinitely difficult thing for us out of His great love will continue to manifest that love to us, especially now that we are of His family. As our text tells us, He will “freely give us all things.” With our best interests at heart, He will see that “all things work together for [our] good” (Romans 8:28).

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). JDM

Thursday, September 22

Things to Be Aware

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” (Matthew 7:15)

There are three Greek words translated “beware,” all of which stress watchfulness and potential danger. In a world under the control of Satan, there are many of his devices that can deceive and undermine the faith and life of the unwary Christian.

Our text cautions against false prophets who *appear* to be true prophets (or teachers, or pastors) but whose apparent spiritual teachings are subversive of biblical truth. John warns that “many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1), and Jesus said they “shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:11). Jesus also warned that His followers should “beware of...the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:12). These sects have their respective modern counterparts in the hypocrisy of legalists and the skepticism of liberals, both of which are destructive of true biblical faith and life.

Very relevant to today’s humanistic intellectualism is the warning of Colossians 2:8: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” This is the Bible’s only reference to philosophy, here evidently equated with “vain deceit.”

Finally, the apostle Peter says, “Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Peter 3:17). In context, Peter is referring to those Christian brethren who have distorted the Scriptures in order to seek an accommodation with the naturalistic worldview of establishment intellectuals (2 Peter 3:3-6, 16). Thus, Peter, John, and Christ Himself would urge constant wariness on our part. HMM

Friday, September 23

The Creation of Plants

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.” (Genesis 1:11)

One of the favorite biblical arguments used by Christian advocates of an old earth comes from a forced interpretation of this verse. While the verse seems to teach “sudden” creation, old-earth advocates interpret the verse to necessitate an indefinite time period, at least long enough for seeds to grow up into mature, seed-bearing plants. Plants differ widely and are thought to have evolved all throughout Earth history. The third day, then, must be understood as long enough to witness the appearance of all “kinds” of plants and is equated with a vast stretch of geologic time. However, there are many biblical problems with this view—a few of which follow.

Scripture teaches that “in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Exodus 20:11; see also Genesis 2:1-4), and no meaning other than a solar day is biblically defensible. The “herbs” and “trees” mentioned can only mean small or woody plants that supposedly arrived late on the evolutionary scale, for the same words are used to identify food plants on Day 6.

Furthermore, the verb “bring forth” (Genesis 1:11) is also used when God made animals, “Let the earth *bring forth* the living creature” (v. 24), on the sixth day. It cannot be referring to the growth of a seed out of the ground but rather must imply the sudden creation of both plants and animals in abundance.

Such compromises are impossible biblically and are quite unnecessary. There are no true facts of science that are incompatible with the young-earth teaching of Scripture. We can be sure of its teachings. JDM

Saturday, September 24

Singing Garments of Life

*“The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.”
(Psalm 65:13)*

This is the concluding verse of the beautiful 65th Psalm, climaxing a remarkable series of testimonies about God’s providential care of His creation. In this final figure, the lands are pictured as clothed in beautiful, living garments—garments that shout and sing in joyful praise to their Maker.

The figure would be better appreciated in biblical times or in certain lands (e.g., New Zealand) today where flocks of sheep are so abundant that they literally seem to cover the pasture lands in wool. The flocks first provide a metaphorical garment for the pastures, then literal clothing for men and women. Similarly, the fertile valleys are everywhere arrayed in golden grain, which later provides food for both the animals and human beings.

And “the sounds of the earth are like music,” as the song so eloquently expresses it. For those with ears to hear and eyes to see, praise is everywhere being offered up to our great Creator and faithful Sustainer by the very creation itself.

Jesus also spoke of the beautiful garments of creation: “And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (Matthew 6:28-30).

The verse following our text, therefore, appropriately exhorts, “Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands...All the earth shall worship thee” (Psalm 66:1, 4). HMM

Sunday, September 25

Jesus, Our Bread of Life

“And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger.” (John 6:35)

This verse is the first of seven “I am” statements of Jesus in John’s gospel that vividly describe His character and nature to His followers. It was announced to the people shortly after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 with only two small fishes and five barley loaves. As the well-fed crowd followed Jesus, He rebuked them, saying, “Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John 6:26). He further exhorted them to “labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you” (v. 27).

But how do we feed our souls using the analogy of bread nourishing our physical bodies? We don’t have long to wait in this narrative because Jesus soon proclaims, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (v. 63).

When Christ was tempted by the devil to satisfy His bodily hunger after 40 days of fasting, He proclaimed, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The Lord also proclaimed, “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness” (Isaiah 55:2).

Let us purpose in our hearts to prayerfully and daily feed upon God’s sustaining and powerful Word. JPT

Monday, September 26

Light of the World

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

We live in a dark and sin-cursed world that seems to be getting darker every day, and this second of the “I am” declarations of Jesus is the solution. Before we put our faith in Christ, we were dead and lost in the darkness of sin. “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). This quickening is based on Christ’s light. “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Beyond the new birth, the need for Christ’s light continues daily in the life of the believer. “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth” (1 John 2:8). Just as plants need light to grow, continuing life will never occur apart from light. The light of Jesus through His Word guides and sustains us. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105).

We desperately need this infusing light because we are prone to darkness, with a proclivity toward sin. We are not only sustained by Christ’s light, but our new identity in Him is to reflect God’s light. “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Matthew 5:14). And “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). JPT

Tuesday, September 27

Door of the Sheep

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.”
(John 10:7)*

Jesus was not just making another notable “I am” statement in this verse but also putting forth a sober warning. This warning is related to the statement likening His followers to sheep, a common theme for God’s people in the Old Testament as well. Sheep are directionless, weak, prone to wandering, timid, stubborn, easily frightened, and utterly defenseless against predators. Without a shepherd, they are in deep trouble.

Jesus goes on to say, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). The sheepfold is the pen in which the sheep are kept at night, and the shepherd controls the door. On a daily basis, the shepherd leads the sheep to feed. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters” (Psalm 23:2).

This discourse of Jesus is made even stronger by pointing out the nature of our adversary, a thief who seeks to enter the sheepfold to “steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10). Christ also pointed out the influence of bad shepherds (hirelings), who “seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep” (v. 12).

But thankfully for us, Jesus is “the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (v. 11). “And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice” (v. 4). Let us put aside the distractions and deceptions of this world and follow Jesus to green pastures. JPT

Wednesday, September 28

The Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

This verse contains the fourth “I am” statement of Jesus in John’s gospel. It’s given in the same discourse in which He previously indicated He is also the door of the sheepfold. The two ideas are connected because Middle Eastern shepherds would often sleep at the entrance of the sheepfold and literally become the door by which predators were barred and the sheep were led in and out.

But Christ is adding yet another dimension, and He elaborates with the clause “the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” And we know this to be so because through Him “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

But when Jesus is referring to His sheep, He’s not just talking about His initial mission wherein He was “sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). In fact, He clarifies who His sheep will eventually be in John 10:16: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

Praise God that Christ’s mission went global, as prophesied by Isaiah: “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6). And Paul proclaimed, “Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:11-13). JPT

Thursday, September 29

The Resurrection and the Life

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25)

The backdrop to this fifth “I am” declaration of Jesus in John’s gospel is the death of Lazarus four days before Christ’s arrival with His disciples in Bethany. Martha, Lazarus’ sister, met Jesus and said, “If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:21). Jesus then gave her the powerful declaration in today’s text, followed by “and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (v. 26).

Jesus’ declaration of being “the resurrection, and the life” went well beyond what He was going to do in raising Lazarus from the dead. He was proclaiming His divinity and power to raise any man from the dead and impart resurrection life. In John 5:21, we read, “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.”

While our mortal life ebbs away, the life Jesus gives to those who put their faith in Him never ends. John 5:24 says, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

The resurrection life of Jesus is not just for the afterlife but also provides hope and strength in the midst of a sin-cursed world. Paul declared that God “hath quickened us together with Christ...and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5-6), and “as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). JPT

Friday, September 30

The Way, the Truth, and the Life

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

The context of Jesus’ sixth “I am” statement in John’s gospel is the discourse in which Jesus had just told His disciples that He would soon be leaving them. The concern among the disciples was obviously building, especially after Jesus said, “And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:4), to which Thomas replied, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (v. 5). Then Jesus proclaimed, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (v. 6).

This profound declaration of His identity addressed the anxiety in the disciples’ minds, countering their confusion and uncertainty. Of course, this proclamation also has comfort for us as Christ’s followers in the midst of a turbulent and unpredictable world.

But Jesus was offering more than assurance and consolation. He was also making a profound statement of exclusivity, emphasized in the final clause “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This statement stands in direct opposition to the popular opinion of a fallen and rebellious world that wants to proclaim there are many paths to God. Indeed, we are admonished in Scripture that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5), and “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

While there are many paths leading to deception and destruction, Christ is the only way to truth and life. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus said, “For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction...narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” JPT

Saturday, October 1

The True Vine

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.”
(John 15:1)*

This seventh and last “I am” statement of Jesus in John’s gospel was made immediately prior to His earthly departure. Although He was physically leaving, Christ admonished His followers to continue abiding in Him as the true source of life. This foundational faith-based paradigm is affirmed in 1 Peter 1:8-9: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

But this whole concept of abiding in Christ for life and sustenance is contrary to the world’s wisdom, which pushes the meme of self-actualization whereby the individual is the ultimate determining factor in all success. While hard work and diligence are important in life, if you are not connected to the true vine, Jesus Christ, it’s all for nothing. Christ elaborated, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4). Needless to say, the stark analogy is that a branch severed from the main supporting vine withers and dies.

But Jesus expands on the analogy of the Father God being the husbandman, saying, “And every branch [in me] that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (v. 2). The purging, or pruning, process involves the removal of unproductive plant growth that would otherwise divert resources from the plant’s goal of bearing fruit. In this regard, Hebrews 12:11 says, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” JPT

Stand Fast

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth....For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psalm 33:6, 9)

Many is the modern-day evangelical who has attempted to harmonize the plain sense of the Scriptures with Big Bang cosmogony, concepts of stellar evolution, and a uniformitarian framework for Earth history. This exercise seldom results in a tempering of secular thought but rather results in a compromising reinterpretation of Scripture, making it say something it clearly does not say.

The Bible says that “the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3), that all things that now exist were simply called into existence at God’s spoken command.

Creation was a true miracle. It was not (as some insist) merely a godly oversight of cosmic processes acting on eternal matter, nor was it the gradual appearance and disappearance of matter in a steady-state transformation. Only a poor regard for Scripture, coupled with an overly high regard for current astronomical theory, could interpret Hebrews 11:3 as the explosion of a tiny, super-dense “cosmic egg” (that did not “appear,” i.e., too small to see), itself the result of a “quantum fluctuation in a vacuum” in a Big Bang that produced the entire universe.

Rather, as implied in the formula “Let there be...and there was” repeated many times in Genesis 1, and as described in our text and elsewhere, all things derive simply from His spoken word. Our response should not be to disbelieve and twist but to believe and praise. “Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him” (Psalm 33:8). JDM

Monday, October 3

Sin Not

“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” (Ephesians 4:26)

There are many occasions when a Christian may be rightly angered by some ugly word or incident and thus be strongly tempted to respond in kind. Our text, however, reminds us that such a reaction for a Christian is sin, and it urges us to get control of our anger before sundown. We are not to let our anger fester until it breaks out in action.

A very similar command was given long ago to Old Testament believers also. “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah” (Psalm 4:4). When angry, it is far better to wait and communicate with God about it in bed than to bring recriminations in the street (or, perhaps, in the home) against the ones who have angered us.

The Lord Jesus Himself is always our example, “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

Anger is often one of the most difficult areas to overcome in the Christian life. As James says, “The tongue can no man tame... Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God... My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3:8-10). Nevertheless, what man cannot tame, God can!

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20). “Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). Anger may come, but to act in anger is sin. HMM

Tuesday, October 4

Angels Round About

“The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Psalm 34:7)

Since God’s angels are normally unseen, we have little appreciation of how intimately they are involved in our lives. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). As in our text, there may well be a protecting angel embracing and delivering us in times of danger. “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11-12).

Angels are sometimes called on to rout the enemies of God and His people. “Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul...and let the angel of the LORD chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the LORD persecute them” (Psalm 35:4-6).

Angels are intensely interested in the salvation and spiritual growth of believers, “which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12). “For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Corinthians 4:9). There are even occasions when “some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

There is “an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22), beings of great power and wisdom (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Samuel 14:20). They are not omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient, of course, since they—like us—were created by God simply to obey God. “Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Psalm 103:20).

Finally, we shall be “carried by the angels” (Luke 16:22) into God’s presence. Then we can better understand and thank them for all the many services rendered to us here on Earth. HMM

Wednesday, October 5

Christ the Creationist

“For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.” (Mark 13:19)

In predicting a future judgment on the unbelieving world, the Lord Jesus referred to “the beginning of the creation which God created,” thus affirming the biblical doctrine of supernatural, sudden creation. In the pagan world of His day, evolutionism was dominant almost everywhere. The Epicureans, for example, were atheistic evolutionists. The Stoics, Gnostics, Platonists, and others were pantheistic evolutionists. None of the extra-biblical philosophers of His day believed in a God who had created all things, including even the universe itself.

But Christ was a creationist, and the much-maligned “scientific creationists” of today are following His example and teaching. He even believed in *recent* creation, for He said (speaking of Adam and Eve) that “from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6). The pagans all believed in an eternal cosmos, but Jesus said it had a beginning and that man and woman were a part of that beginning creation, following which “the sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27).

He also believed that the “two accounts” of creation (Genesis 1 and 2) were complementary, not contradictory, for He quoted from both in the same context. “Have ye not read,” He said, “that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female [Genesis 1], And said For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh [Genesis 2]?” (Matthew 19:4-6).

There may be some Christians who are evolutionists, but there is no such thing as “Christian evolution,” for Christ was a creationist! HMM

Thursday, October 6

Walk as He Walked

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” (1 John 2:6)

The idea of walking as Christ walked can be intimidating to a Christian. After all, the sinless Son of God, Himself fully God, who gave up everything to serve and save rebellious mankind, set an exceedingly high standard. Nothing short of perfection and total sacrifice will do. Nevertheless, while we recognize that we will never fully achieve Christlikeness on this side of glory, we have “received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6). Let us note several specific commands in the New Testament that describe such a walk.

First and foremost, we are to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25; Romans 8:1-4). The empowering of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to “walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12; Ephesians 4:1). Furthermore, our walk is a walk of faith: “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

We must “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (Ephesians 5:2), and since “now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (v. 8; see also 1 John 1:7). We will make good use of our opportunities as we “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16; Colossians 4:5).

We must “walk in truth” (3 John 1:4) and in honesty (1 Thessalonians 4:12; Romans 13:13). This walk will be evident to all by our “good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Such a victorious walk might be its own reward; but there is more. Our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, has said of those who overcome that “they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4). JDM

Friday, October 7

A Credible Lifestyle

“And John was clothed with camel’s hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey.” (Mark 1:6)

At times we tend to think of John the Baptist as a wild man, one who would have been either an offense or a laughingstock to those he was trying to reach, but in reality quite the opposite was true. He was greatly respected and believed; some even wondered if he should have been worshiped as “that prophet” (i.e., the Messiah) or revered as Elijah (John 1:21). His “preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3) was so effective that not only the common people (v. 10) but also the publicans (v. 12), soldiers (v. 14), priests, and Levites (John 1:19), as well as the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matthew 3:7), came to hear his teaching. Many repented and were baptized.

Far from lacking credibility, John’s style was what was expected of a prophet. Indeed, his ministry and message were in fulfillment of those of Elijah (Malachi 4:5), who himself “was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins” (2 Kings 1:8). Even false prophets mimicked this style to gain credibility (Zechariah 13:4).

The point is, we should strive to package our timeless message of the gospel of Christ in such a way as to gain the greatest hearing and the most true converts. This is not to say that we should dress as John or Elijah did, for that would be bizarre in today’s world. Nor should we flaunt riches, for both styles detract from the message and induce ridicule and blasphemy.

Perhaps the principle is to dress and act as the hearers would expect a credible, sober conveyer of truth to behave. Let us be careful to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10). JDM

Tragic Ignorance

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” (Luke 19:41-42)

The Lord had finally acknowledged to the Jewish leaders that He was their promised Messiah, riding into the city on a donkey’s colt in fulfillment of prophecy (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1-7), but they refused to accept and prepared to crucify Him. Therefore, Jesus wept over the city, for He knew it would soon be destroyed “because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:44).

There are many other cases of such tragic ignorance in the Bible. For example, “Samson...wist not that the LORD was departed from him” (Judges 16:20), and it cost him his great strength and finally his life.

The ungodly sinners in the days of Noah “knew not until the flood came, and took them all away” (Matthew 24:39). Of the northern kingdom of Israel, it was said: “Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not” (Hosea 7:9). These “strangers” were the pagan Canaanites who had turned the people away from the true God.

This is a real danger facing many church and parachurch organizations of the end times, typified by the church at Laodicea. The Lord says to such churches, “I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:16-17).

May God deliver each of us from tragic ignorance of our need before Him. We should pray with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). HMM

Sunday, October 9

Why Give Thanks to Yahweh?

“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” (Psalm 103:1-2)

As one popular Christian song proclaims, those who are “in Christ” have 10,000 reasons to be thankful! In the first two verses of Psalm 103, David calls himself to personal praise, reminding himself that he is to praise Yahweh always. The pronouns are singular, underscoring his personal role in praise and thanksgiving as he reminds himself of all his inherited spiritual blessings. “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy [spiritual] diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (vv. 3-5). Wow! Forgiveness, redemption, and satisfaction—all such undeserved blessings for David and all true believers who trust solely in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Turning from a personal thrust, David then focuses on all true believers in verses 6 to 18 as the pronouns change to “we,” “us,” and “our,” giving priceless reasons for praise. One of the capstone verses in this treasure chest of blessings is verse 8: “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” The word gracious, coupled with the word compassion, occurs 11 times in the Old Testament. Why? Because grace is the foundation on which God bestows His endless compassion.

So, why praise and give thanks to Yahweh? Because His goodness is displayed to all when we deserve nothing but eternal damnation. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Ephesians 2:4-5). CM

Monday, October 10

The True Gospel

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.” (Galatians 1:6)

There is only one true gospel (meaning “good news”) in Christianity, but there are many false gospels. Various cults have proposed such concepts as the social gospel, the prosperity gospel, the full gospel, and others, but it is dangerous to attach adjectives or other modifiers to the gospel unless these are specifically attached to it in the Scriptures. There are enough of these, however, to emphasize that the true gospel does have many facets. God’s “good news” is always about Christ—His person and work—but His work is from eternity to eternity, and He is both the mighty God and perfect man. Therefore, with Paul we can say, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16).

The gospel is the “everlasting gospel,” focusing on Him as the one “that made heaven, and earth” (Revelation 14:6-7). It is also the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23), focusing on Him as the coming “King of kings” (Revelation 17:14).

It is the wonderful “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24) and “the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13). Thus, it also is the true “gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15), reconciling man to God.

Because Christ is God, this “gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1) is surely the one true “gospel of God” (Romans 1:1). This is the gospel that we have been commissioned by Christ to preach “to every creature” (Mark 16:15), so we need no other. And since it is, indeed, “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Timothy 1:11), we should never desire another. It meets every spiritual need for time and eternity. HMM

Tuesday, October 11

Right Now!

“Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Peter 2:10)

There are many wonderful things awaiting us in heaven if we have trusted Christ for our salvation. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

But there are also many wonderful gifts and privileges we have right now. In the first place, we already have eternal salvation. “Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). That means also that we are free from any condemnation at the judgment. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

We have already been justified—that is, declared righteous with the righteousness of Christ Himself. “Being *now* justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9). “But *now* the righteousness of God without the law is manifested...Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:21-22). As our text says: we right “*now* have obtained mercy” and right *now* are “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:10).

The apostle John confirms this glorious truth in a beautiful passage. “Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

Finally, we have the wonderful assurance that our Lord Jesus right now is praying for us. For Christ is entered into heaven itself, “*now* to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24), and there He “ever liveth to make intercession” (Hebrews 7:25) for all those who have placed their faith in Him as their Savior and Lord. HMM

Wednesday, October 12

On Eschewing Evil

“For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.” (1 Peter 3:10-11)

The venerable English word “eschew” is not used much these days, perhaps because there is not much evil that people eschew any more. Nevertheless, a wonderful formula is couched in this terminology in our text. If anyone desires to “see good days,” then he should “eschew evil,” even in his speech, and instead “do good.”

The Greek word translated “eschew” here is *ekklineo*, meaning “incline away from.” That is, instead of having an attitude that “inclines toward” evil, as the world does, the Christian’s inclination must be its polar opposite.

The word is used only two other times in the New Testament. “Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and *avoid* them” (Romans 16:17). We are not only to eschew evil words and deeds but also evil men who teach things contrary to God’s Word. The other occurrence refers to what ungodly men eschew. “They are all gone out of the way...there is none that doeth good” (Romans 3:12). Here *ekklineo* is translated “gone out of the way.” The ungodly eschew doing good; those who would love real life and see good days must do good and eschew evil.

That such an attitude honors and pleases God is especially evident from His thrice-repeated testimony concerning the patriarch Job, “a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Job saw some bad days, of course, but there were far more good days of great blessing until he finally died “full of days” (Job 42:17). Like Job, let us eschew—shun, avoid, run away from—evil in any form. HMM

Thursday, October 13

Recognizing the Son of God

“For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (2 Peter 1:17)

Most people today consider Jesus Christ to have been a great man but will not believe He is the unique Son of God. Nevertheless, He is indeed God’s only begotten Son.

Before His birth, the angel Gabriel predicted it. “That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). John the Baptist identified Him. “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34). His disciples recognized Him. “Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God” (John 1:49). “Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). John said that the very purpose of his gospel was to demonstrate “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). After Christ’s resurrection, even Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

The powers of darkness grudgingly acknowledged who He was. “And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God” (Mark 3:11). Even the centurion who supervised His crucifixion had to confess, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54). Most important of all was the testimony of God the Father from heaven to Christ’s Sonship, both at His baptism (e.g., Mark 1:11) and on the Mount of Transfiguration, as Peter records in our text.

Therefore, it is necessary for our salvation that we also believe this. “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). HMM

Summing up Submission

“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5)

Although this book was written to Christians during a time of horrible persecution, much of it is concerned with submission. Believers are to submit to the government (2:13-17); slaves to their masters (2:18-20); wives to their husbands (3:1-6); husbands to their wives (3:7); and each one to the other, as in our text, in just the same way Christ submitted to God’s plan for His suffering and death (2:21-25).

A summary of this teaching is found in 1 Peter 3:8-12. “Be ye all of one mind” (v. 8), Peter tells us, and live in harmony. Paul taught, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). There are exceptions to the rule (e.g., the primary doctrines of Scripture), but the Christian normally should not be the one to break the peace. He should do everything short of compromise to live in harmony.

Continuing (see 1 Peter 3:8), we should have “compassion” for others (such as the rulers, employers, and spouses mentioned). We should “love as brethren” and choose to serve rather than be served. “Pitiful” is usually translated “tenderhearted,” and “courteous” implies “humble in spirit.”

We should return a blessing for a curse instead of replying in kind (1 Peter 3:9). We should choose our words, use our speech carefully (v. 10), and “eschew” (i.e., avoid) evil (v. 11), actively replacing evil behavior with good. Peace must be consciously pursued.

There is great reward in such a lifestyle and attitude. In doing so, we will “inherit a blessing” (v. 9) and “see good days” (v. 10). “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (v. 12). JDM

Saturday, October 15

The Creator's WD-40

“Know ye that the LORD he is God: It is he that hath [created] us.” (Psalm 100:3)

A fix-it substance used today in most homes resides in a little blue can labeled WD-40. This liquid gold lubricates, preserves, and safeguards all kinds of stuff. But there's a much more priceless spiritual liquid that all believers “in Christ” need to apply to protect their lives from this world's evil influences.

Psalm 100 teaches that the prerequisite to proper Christian worship is knowing the God we worship. “It is he that hath [created] us, and not we ourselves” (v. 3). What are the implications of knowing Yahweh as our all-knowing Creator? Because He formed us in the womb (Psalm 139:15), He knows our inner workings and what's required for us to live glorifying lives.

Peter unpacks this specifically. For you have been “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). First, we need to be transformed as new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Even after the new birth, believers are still prone to the rusting, degenerative effects of the Fall. “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1 Peter 1:24).

What is the spiritual antidote to these decaying elements? “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Peter 1:25). God's Word is the believer's priceless spiritual lubricant, coupled with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1-2).

Believer, are you being transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:1-2) and by God's clearly written and communicated Word? This liquid gold is able to safeguard your fragile being. CM

Sunday, October 16

The Invitations of Christ

“He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.” (John 1:39)

This is the first of the gracious invitations of the Lord Jesus to “come” to Him. On this occasion, right after His baptism by John, He invited two potential disciples to come with Him to His dwelling place. Very likely, this was an outdoor mat somewhere, for He soon afterward acknowledged that “the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Nevertheless, one night of abiding with Jesus changed their lives. Soon afterward, He issued another invitation to them. “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17), and they never went home again. First He invites us to come see and know Him, then to come with Him to win others.

There is also the wonderful invitation to come to Him for relief from our burdens and cares. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). And note His promise to those who do accept His invitation: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

There were also personal invitations. To Zacchaeus, the seeking sinner glimpsing Jesus from a sycamore tree, He said, “Come down; for to day I must abide at thy house” (Luke 19:5). To His friend Lazarus, dead and bound in a tomb, He cried, “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43), and not even the grave could prevent his accepting such a call.

There are other invitations from the Lord with gracious promises to those who come, but note especially the final invitation of the Bible. “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). HMM

Monday, October 17

Who's Holding Your Hand?

“But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.” (Psalm 31:14-15)

Psalm 31 describes David at a time of great need. There was “fear...on every side” (v. 13). He was despised, defamed, and persecuted. Jeremiah used the same phrase, “fear is on every side” (Jeremiah 6:25; 49:29), to describe his turbulent circumstances.

Where do we turn when we encounter “divers temptations” (James 1:2)? We follow the ultimate example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who expressed confidence in God despite the hateful wickedness that encircled Him while He hung on the cross, finally crying out, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Likewise, in today's text David, as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), emphatically shifted his attention away from his momentary entanglements and looked solely to his sovereign God. The phrase “my times” includes all the turmoil and change he was feeling. But also notice that “my times” expresses the reality of a firm grasp in the tight grip of “Yahweh's hand.”

As Thomas Reade wrote, “When [a believer] beholds, by faith, the unerring hand of infinite wisdom, wielding the stupendous machine of human events, causing everything to promote the spiritual good of His people, then he quiets himself as a little child, and can say with cheerful resignation, ‘Father, not my will, but yours be done.’”

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25). CM

Tuesday, October 18

The Sinner's Prayer

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13)

Evangelists have often urged lost men and women to pray this "sinner's prayer" if they desired to be saved. The account does say that this publican, after praying thus, "went down to his house justified" (v. 14).

But there is more here than appears on the surface. It is not merely God's mercy that is needed, for He has already been merciful to let us continue to live at all. The word translated "merciful" is used only one other time in the New Testament and is there translated "make reconciliation for." Speaking of the saving work of Christ, it says that He came "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). It is also closely related to the words for "propitiation" and "mercy seat."

This parable of the Pharisee and the publican is set in the context of the Jewish temple worship, where sinners would bring their sacrificial offerings to cover their sins, knowing that "it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). Such sacrifices were completely worthless, however, if offered in a spirit of religious pride and/or self-righteousness, like those of the Pharisee. There must be repentance and faith in God's promise of forgiveness through the death of an innocent substitute, pre-figuring the true Lamb of God whose coming death would truly make eternal reconciliation for the sins of the people. The publican prayed in this vein, and he was saved.

In our day, on the other side of the cross, a sinner's saving prayer must say, in effect, "God, be propitiated to me on the basis of the death of Christ for my sins." Such a prayer, offered in sincere repentance and faith in God's promise, brings justification before God. HMM

Wednesday, October 19

The Test of Expedience

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” (1 Corinthians 6:12)

Christians are saved by the grace of God, not by works of righteousness. Therefore, in a sense, they are free to do whatever they please. “All things are lawful unto me.” The Christian, however, is under a higher law, the law of love and of seeking to please and honor his Savior and Lord.

Therefore, when a question arises as to whether a certain act is right or wrong, the decision should be based on how the act impacts the cause of Christ. Does it help or hinder in the winning of the lost or in edifying the believer? Does it honor the Lord and His Word or bring reproach against His truth? For example, Paul concluded he could not afford to “be brought under the power of any” practice (e.g., drinking, smoking, gambling) that might limit the power of God over his actions and decisions.

In a similar passage, Paul says, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Corinthians 10:23). Thus, nothing is expedient for the Christian that does not edify (that is, “build up”) spiritually either himself or someone else.

In a similar vein, he said elsewhere that “there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean....Let not then your good be evil spoken of....Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:14, 16, 19).

This test of expediency, therefore, if applied sincerely by the believer in terms of advancing or hindering the purposes of God in Christ, can be of great help in decision making regarding doubtful issues. HMM

Thursday, October 20

The Scarlet Hope

“Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father’s household, home unto thee.” (Joshua 2:18)

These words were spoken to Rahab by Joshua’s spies after she had protected them from discovery by the officials of Jericho. She had testified to the spies that “the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Joshua 2:11). Therefore, “by faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace” (Hebrews 11:31).

Rahab’s spiritual salvation came because of her faith in the true God; she soon entered into the covenant family of Israel and eventually even became a member of the family line leading to Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). Her physical deliverance, on the other hand, and that of her family depended on a “line of scarlet thread” suspended from her window, identifying her home as “under the blood,” so to speak, when Jericho fell and all its other inhabitants perished.

This thin, blood-red line constituted a very slender hope for Rahab in the midst of such a scene of judgment and total destruction, but it sufficed. It is fascinating to note that the Hebrew word for “line” (occurring here for the first time in the Bible) is everywhere else translated by the key word “hope.” Perhaps “line” soon came to mean “hope” because of this very experience, when a “scarlet hope” extended all the way from a repentant sinner to the very God of heaven! Note the same thought with the same word: “For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD” (Psalm 71:5).

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). HMM

Friday, October 21

Sudden Creation

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Even a superficial reading of the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 impresses the reader with the idea of suddenness. God simply called the universe into existence from nothing and then quickly set about the rapid formation of certain features, interspersed with other direct creative acts. All of the events, whether creative or formative, seem to have happened over a brief period of time, such as the formation of the plants (Genesis 1:12), the animals (v. 20), and the sun and stars (v. 16).

Even aspects that were evidently formed by a process such as the continents and oceans (v. 10) and humankind (2:7, 22) seemingly took no great length of time.

This is especially true of the creation of light. “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (1:3). No slow and sporadic arrival of light from distant stars is mentioned, nor a gradual heating up of the sun as interstellar gas collapsed and fused. Some evangelical advocates of the old-earth concept hold that God slowly cleared the atmosphere of leftover interstellar dust that allowed the light from the sun and stars to penetrate to the earth.

But, if Scripture alone is our authority, then it happened suddenly and spectacularly. As discussed in our text, it happened just as suddenly and just as supernaturally as a new creature is created out of a dead creature at the moment of salvation. Sanctification may be a lifelong matter, but “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17), literally creation. No more time is required for the transformation than for darkness to turn into light at the Creator’s command. JDM

Saturday, October 22

The Unfailing Presence

“And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” (Genesis 28:15)

This is the first of many promises of God’s unfailing presence with those who trust Him. The words of our text were spoken to Jacob on his flight from the unwarranted wrath of Esau. Those expositors who unjustifiably accuse Jacob of fraud when he secured the birthright promised to him by God before his birth (Genesis 25:23) should note that God never rebuked Jacob but instead promised His perpetual protecting presence.

Note also God’s promise to Joshua: “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5).

There is also His promise to His chosen people, Israel: “For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people” (1 Samuel 12:22). There are many other such assurances in the Scriptures. One that especially reveals God’s heart is Isaiah 41:17: “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.”

The most precious of all, however, is the assurance to all New Testament believers that “I will never [literally ‘never, never, never’] leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Paul teaches after an exhausting list of possibilities that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). “Lo, I am with you always,” Jesus said, “even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). HMM

Sunday, October 23

Light Affliction?

*“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”
(2 Corinthians 4:17)*

Paul’s afflictions could hardly be considered “light” in the realm of natural human reasoning. Later in this epistle, Paul recounts beatings, imprisonments, grievous perils during many journeys, hunger, thirst, lack of clothing, and numerous persecutions (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). And just a few verses earlier, he said, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (4:8-9). Indeed, immediately after Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus Christ foretold to Ananias in a vision concerning Paul, “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).

In modern Christianity, the gospel is often watered down and portrayed as a means of self-empowerment to achieve one’s personal goals and dreams. But Christ preached, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:24-25).

When this mandate is followed, we can expect trouble and persecution. But despite everything the devil and the world can throw against us, we can be assured that these light and temporal afflictions are just for a passing moment in comparison to a glorious eternity with Jesus Christ. Thus, we have the precious promise that these things work for us “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” and “the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). JPT

Beguiling with Enticing Words

“And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.” (Colossians 2:4)

This Scripture is a perfect representation of those who would try to deceive people into accepting the false paradigm of Darwinian evolution, in which nature serves as an imposter diety magically crafting and molding creatures over millions of years.

The verse contains two very interesting Greek words that occur rarely in the New Testament. The first word of note is only used twice and is the verb *paralogizomai*, translated here as “beguile.” It was used by the ancient Greeks to denote persuasiveness of speech or the putting forth of a seemingly plausible argument undergirded by dangerously false information. The second time it’s used is in James 1:22 concerning self-deception: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving [*paralogizomai*] your own selves.”

The second Greek word of note is the highly descriptive noun *pithanologia*, translated as “enticing words,” and is only used in this one place in the New Testament. It’s a combination of the word *pithanos*, meaning convincing, persuasive, or plausible, with *logos*, meaning word or account. The Greeks used it to describe arguments made by sophists, who were noted for affirming false scenarios, trying to make them appear true. In modern English we would say “to talk someone into something false.”

Paul indicated he had to make this warning concerning deception because he’d just previously declared “the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3). Indeed, all evolutionary deception ultimately steals the glory of Jesus Christ the Creator, “for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (v. 9). JPT

Tuesday, October 25

The Accounting of God's Glory

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” (Psalm 19:1)

This is a keynote passage of the Old Testament affirming what's proclaimed by the apostle Paul in Romans 1:20: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.”

The psalmist uses an interesting set of Hebrew words to make his point. The first is the verb *sāpar*, translated “declare.” It has the meaning to count, list, make record of. In this context, it points to an indisputable record or accounting of the omnipotent and all-powerful Creator exhibited in the heavens.

As frail humans, we can barely assess the full impact of this heavenly record. What we can observe with our advanced telescopes shows billions of galaxies and other features and formations beyond our wildest imaginations. However, our mighty God “tellethe the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names” (Psalm 147:4) and “bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth” (Isaiah 40:26).

The second word of interest is the verb *nāgad*, translated “sheweth,” which means to explain, announce, and reveal. This verb occurs in the *hiphil* stem, which is the causative active form—meaning that God's handiwork inherently, constantly, and actively declares to all humanity His power and greatness.

It's no wonder that in eternity it will be proclaimed in heaven, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). JPT

Wednesday, October 26

Magnifying Jesus, the Word of God

“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” (Psalm 138:2)

This verse is a powerful declaration of praise to our mighty God in remembrance of His lovingkindness and truth. The word for lovingkindness (*hesed*) is also often translated as mercy. Psalm 108:4 says, “Thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds.” But what about the startling declaration connected to God’s great mercy: “For thou hast magnified *thy word* above all thy name”? Would this not put God and His Word on par with one another?

At the beginning of the gospel of John, we have our answer. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The literal Greek rendering for the final clause is “and God was the Word.” We have even further clarification by John in his gospel that the Word is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). It is this same person of the triune God (*Yahweh Elohim*) by which “all things were made...and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3).

And when Jesus returns in consummation and judgment at the end of this age, the description we’re given is “his eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God” (Revelation 19:12-13).

Praise be to Jesus, our coming King! JPT

Thursday, October 27

The Absence of Sin

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”
(2 Peter 3:13)

For thousands of years the followers of God have battled against “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Ephesians 6:12) led by Lucifer, that old serpent, the arch rebel and self-appointed accuser of the saints of God. Although assured of the ultimate victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, Christians have often suffered cruelly at the hands of Lucifer and his followers.

As Christians, the aching longing in our hearts for peace is really none other than the Holy Spirit Himself grieving at sin, and our own new, holy nature “groaning” to be free in its expression of the divine nature. It is the nature of the child of God to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). It is the normal thing for one “raised” up and already seated “in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6) to long for the shackles of the “body of this death” (Romans 7:24) to be loosened. Under ordinary circumstances, our spiritual being—“the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24)—knows that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). Such knowledge openly declares that we “desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (v. 16).

If we have lost sight of the place that Jesus has gone to prepare for us, we become both forlorn and despoiled. But if we treasure the great truth that we will spend eternity with our Lord in His “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,” we are comforted and encouraged, recognizing that both sin and all its effects will be absent. HMM III

Eternal Responsibilities

*“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)*

Frequently, Christians and non-Christians alike have a misconception about the nature of the coming life in heaven. We will not merely “go to heaven” and sit around in some semblance of holy laziness; we will be given jobs to do! Just what those jobs may be, or what they may require, is not specifically revealed to us, but it is abundantly clear that the kind of job, or the degree of responsibility, will be a privilege based on what we do here on Earth now.

In the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), the Lord Jesus illustrates judgment based on productivity. The same amount of money was given to each of the servants, and only one general instruction was issued: “Occupy till I come” (v. 13). The reward that each servant received was in direct proportion to how much profit he had earned on the nobleman’s money.

In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the nobleman gave differing amounts to each of his servants, “to every man according to his several ability” (v. 15). The reward was based on efficient use of abilities, not on amount of profit produced.

Both of these parables have a common thread: The rewards (analogous to our rewards when the Lord returns), whether based on their productivity or their effectiveness, were rewards of responsibility. To those servants who had proven themselves capable of leadership, the Lord delegated “authority over cities” and rulership “over many things,” assuring us that there will be some sort of social order in the age to come. Likewise we, in our present service for the Lord, are now given the opportunity to earn both God’s commendation and His future greater stewardship. HMM III

Saturday, October 29

Fallow Ground

“For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.” (Jeremiah 4:3)

Fallow ground is ground that has been plowed and readied for sowing but then is withheld and allowed to lie useless and unproductive. God, through His prophet, had to rebuke His people not only because they had left their prepared ground unused but because they were actually sowing their seed on thorn-choked ground. That is, they were turning to idols and forsaking God.

The word “fallow” occurs one other time in the Bible and to the same effect: “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you” (Hosea 10:12). It is poor stewardship and a bad testimony, at best, for the people of God to ignore His righteousness and fail to cultivate His grace in their lives, choosing instead the philosophies and pleasures of the ungodly world around them.

Now, if the ancient Israelites had much unfruitful fallow ground in their lives, many modern Christians are still more blameworthy, for we have far greater opportunities and privileges than the people of ancient Israel.

Most of all, we have the complete Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit, yet our lives are even more cluttered with the thorny ground of worldliness and paganism than theirs. We urgently need to break up our fallow ground, to sow righteousness and reap mercy.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:7-8). HMM

Sunday, October 30

An Acceptable Sacrifice

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5)

Our text instructs us that we, as a corporate church and as individuals, are designed for the purpose of offering up acceptable sacrifices to God. These are not animal sacrifices as before but “spiritual” sacrifices made “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” What kinds of spiritual sacrifices are acceptable?

Prayer. An amazing scene is recorded for us in heaven, for an angel is seen at the altar offering up to God incense mingled with “the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 8:4, see also 5:8). Our prayers are precious to Him.

Giving. The use of our financial resources for the furtherance of His Kingdom becomes “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18).

Praise. In some way not fully comprehended by us, we can “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15).

Good work and sharing. “But to do good and to communicate [share] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). Remember, we are saved entirely by God’s grace but also created specifically unto good works (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Ourselves. We have a distinct privilege in that we may “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

God is a magnificent God! He can be trusted with our prayers, our resources, our praise, our works, and our lives. His perfect sacrifice has made it possible for our sacrifices to be meaningful. JDM

Monday, October 31

Our Living Lord

“Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.” (John 14:19)

We who believe on Christ have the promise of everlasting life because He lives, and we see Him by faith. Christ Himself is “our life” (Colossians 3:4), in fact.

He is the very sustainer of our life. He is both the “living water” (John 4:10) that is “springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14) and “the living bread which came down from heaven,” such wonderful bread “that a man may eat thereof, and not die” (John 6:50-51).

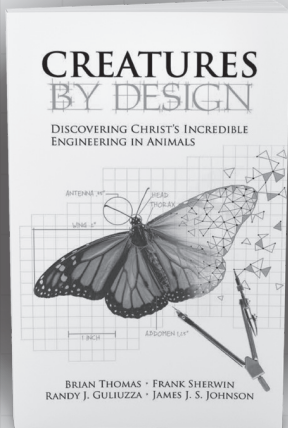
Not only does Christ give us His living bread and living water, but also He provides Himself as the living way to God. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Hebrews 10:19-20).

He is also the solid foundation on which we build our lives, and that very foundation is vibrant with life. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:4-5). Our spiritual lives are built on a living stone, nourished on living bread and living water while entering by a living way into the presence of the living God!

He “hath begotten us again unto a lively hope [same as ‘living hope’] by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4). “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). All this is ours through our loving, living Lord! HMM

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Tuesday, November 1

Praising Yahweh at All Times

“And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison....At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.” (Acts 16:23, 25)

In this world, we live every day with trouble (Job 5:7). How should believers in Christ cope with this reality?

In Paul’s missionary travels recorded in Acts 16, God directed Silas and him to Philippi, where they found themselves beaten, tortured, and left for dead in a dungeon. Yet, they reacted to this trouble by singing praises to God! What enabled them to respond this way? The answer—they filtered their dire situation through two awesome realities found in Psalm 100: “Know ye that the LORD he is God” (v. 3) and “the LORD is good” (v. 5).

The full verse of Psalm 100:3 reads, “Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” Paul lived life knowing that Yahweh was the potter and he was the clay, just an earthen vessel employed in the Lord’s service (2 Corinthians 4:7). Although Paul faced countless trials, he didn’t “fear” evil, for the Shepherd’s “rod and staff” comforted him (Psalm 23:4). Our Shepherd, like Paul’s, is a loving and caring Shepherd (Psalm 78:13).

Not only did Paul know that Yahweh is God, he also knew that “the LORD is good” (Psalm 100:5). God’s steadfast love motivates all He does. Both truths are preceded with the following injunctions to praise God: “Make a joyful noise” (v. 1), “serve the LORD with gladness” (v. 2), “come before his presence with singing” (v. 2), “enter into his gates with thanksgiving” (v. 4), and “be thankful unto him” (v. 4).

Like with Paul and Silas in prison, praise and thanksgiving should characterize all believers who truly know that Yahweh is God and Yahweh is good. CM

Wednesday, November 2

Born of God

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.” (1 John 2:29)

This is the first of seven occurrences of the phrase “born of God,” or “born of him,” in the little epistle of 1 John. If anyone wishes to know how to recognize one who has truly been “born again,” these seven descriptors are available for that purpose.

The first such test, in our text, is that such a person is one “that doeth righteousness.” The second and third are found in 1 John 3:9: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” That is, he will not practice sin because God’s own nature has been implanted in him.

Another evidence is genuine love. “Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7). Still another is genuine faith in Christ, which in turn produces genuine love. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1).

Those who are truly born again will not be permanently defeated by the world. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).

Finally, “we know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18).

The term “born again” is being used very loosely these days, and we need to realize that true regeneration is a permanent, life-transforming miracle accomplished by God Himself in a believer’s life. HMM

Thursday, November 3

Think on These Things

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

It’s nearly impossible these days to turn on the TV, go shopping, go out to eat, read a newspaper, go online, etc., without our minds being cluttered and our thinking infiltrated by all sorts of improper thoughts. In our text, Paul gives us guidelines for our thinking. Let’s investigate them.

True—or genuine, honest, and sincere. We should concentrate on honesty in all our dealings, for “God is true” (John 3:33), and Christ said, “My record is true” (John 8:14).

Honest—or better, honorable toward all. Strive to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:2).

Just—or equitable. “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal” (Colossians 4:1).

Pure—without spot or stain. “Neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22).

Lovely—literally “toward love,” i.e., those things that demonstrate love or a response of love. This word only appears here in the New Testament.

Of good report—that which elicits praise.

Virtue—a standard of righteousness. He “hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).

Praise—our speech should be to “the praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:14).

Surely our lifestyle and thought patterns need adjusting as noted above, particularly when the verb tense in the command “think on these things” implies a lifelong habit—a continuous way of doing things. JDM

Root of Bitterness

“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” (Hebrews 12:15)

Bitterness and a bitter spirit should never characterize a person who has experienced the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ. No matter how seriously one may have been wronged, if he has known God’s forgiving grace for his own wrongdoings, he should manifest that same grace in his life toward others, even though they do not merit it (for neither did he merit God’s forgiving grace himself).

Bitterness is a characteristic of the ungodly “whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans 3:14). A Christian must never try to rationalize it as “righteous indignation” or to think that certain injustices give him the “right” to be bitter and resentful. “If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:14-15). Rooted bitterness will soon “spring up,” not only robbing the bitter believer of joy and true fruitfulness, but bearing bitter fruit whereby many others will “be defiled.”

The antidote, of course, is never to “fail of the grace of God.” That is, we need to be “looking diligently,” moment by moment, at the wonderful grace of God by which we were saved through faith and in which we continue to live each day.

Therefore, “let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31-32). Otherwise, we not only hurt both ourselves and others, but we also grieve “the holy Spirit of God” (v. 30). HMM

Saturday, November 5

Ask What Ye Will

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (John 15:7)

The precious promise in this verse has been an inspiration to the faithful down through the centuries. It becomes even more amazing when attention is paid to the original Greek language in which it was written.

Abiding implies a close personal fellowship with someone; in this case, the personal, loving Lord Jesus: “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (v. 9). Such an abiding on our part will be evidenced by obedience, love for Him and for the brethren, and joy (vv. 10-14). Our minds and hearts will be in total harmony with His, guided by such a walk and His words.

“Ye shall ask” does not carry the proper force in English. This is a command in the imperative mode in Greek—a challenge, if you will. He challenges us to “ask what ye will” (literally “whatever ye desire”) and see Him faithful. Desire speaks of something different from need; indeed, it speaks of an “inclination.” He is not afraid we will ask for selfish inclinations, for if we “abide” in Him, our desires are His desires, and we will naturally ask for those things that glorify Him. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (v. 8).

Notice the word “done,” which in Greek stems from the word meaning “to come into existence.” God will answer our unselfish prayers, even if He has to transcend natural law or even create something to do so. He even challenges us to “ask” without hesitation, as implied by the Greek construction.

If we meet the condition of “abiding” in Him, as a branch “abides” in the vine (vv. 1-5), He will place in us the desire to bring forth much fruit (v. 5) to His glory and to our everlasting delight. JDM

Sunday, November 6

Christ Our Leader

“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” (Hebrews 2:10)

The Lord never asks us to go anywhere that He has not gone before. He is the captain (literally, the “leader”) of our salvation, and we only need follow our divine leader. The same word is used in Hebrews 12:2, where we are exhorted to be “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.” “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince [same word] and a Saviour” (Acts 5:31).

The same wonderful truth appears under various figures. He is our Shepherd, for instance, and He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (John 10:27-28). He also illumines our path. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). He guides us along the way by His indwelling Holy Spirit. “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth....and he will show you things to come” (John 16:13).

With such a dauntless leader, a perfect example, a loving Shepherd, a clear light, and an infallible guide, we are (or should be) happy to follow Him, even if the way sometimes seems steep and hard.

He is the goal and prize at the end of the journey. For Him, Paul said, “I have suffered the loss of all things...that I may win Christ...forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:8, 13-14). HMM

Monday, November 7

Where to Bestow Our Wealth

“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?” (Luke 12:16-17)

God called this rich man “thou fool” (Luke 12:20) because, rich as he was in his own eyes, he was “not rich toward God” (v. 21). Instead of choosing to bestow his goods on others in need or on any kind of ministry for God, he decided to build more barns, and “there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods” (v. 18). The barns did not need them, however, and neither did the rich fool, for he died the very night on which he made this selfish decision.

The intensity of his self-centered nature is pointed up by the fact that he used personal pronouns (I, my) no less than 11 times in three verses (vv. 17-19). Furthermore, no counselor advised him on this course of action. He just “thought within himself” (v. 17) to keep it all for his own comfort and pleasure.

Jesus told this parable not just to rebuke selfish rich people, however, but to warn all of us against the wicked sin of covetousness “which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). “Beware of covetousness,” He said in introducing the parable, “for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

Complaining American Christians (and almost all American Christians are wealthy compared to multitudes in many other nations) need to hear the ancient word of the psalmist still relevant today: “Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him....Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:16-17, 20). HMM

Tuesday, November 8

For Us

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

“Christian” liberals for many generations have scoffed at the biblical doctrine that the death of Christ could serve as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. Like all other religions, their form of religion assumes that each person is responsible for his own salvation, which must somehow be earned by his own good deeds and religious observances. Some have a very rigid code of ethics, some talk of mental attitudes that ascend to higher planes through meditation, some emphasize only love, others simply feel that the good must somehow outweigh the bad. All rely on human abilities to gain salvation.

Nevertheless, the Bible clearly teaches that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) and, as our text emphasizes, “Christ died for us.” This pungent phrase, “for us,” appears repeatedly in the New Testament. Listen to this refrain:

“[God] spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity” (Titus 2:14). “Christ also suffered for us” (1 Peter 2:21).

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). Hereby we perceive His great love for us! He was delivered up for us, sacrificed for us, made a curse for us; He gave Himself for us, suffered for us, and laid down His life for us. We were helpless, lost in sin, altogether unable to pay for our sins, but “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), and we are saved! HMM

Wednesday, November 9

Never Forsaken

“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

The promise that God will never leave or forsake His people occurs often in Scripture. It was given here through Moses to the children of Israel as they were preparing to enter the land promised long ago to Abraham. Two verses later, it was then repeated personally for Joshua, who was to be their leader in the coming battles.

Essentially the same promise had been made to Jacob as he began to assume his God-ordained role. “Behold, I am with thee,” God had said, “For I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (Genesis 28:15). It was again repeated directly to Joshua by God. “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5).

David passed on the same promise to Solomon as he became responsible for the kingdom and for building the great temple. “[God] will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 28:20). “I the God of Israel will not forsake them” (Isaiah 41:17) was the Lord’s promise still later to the faithful Israelites.

And we can rejoice today in this same wonderful promise. “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5-6). This remarkable verse has five negatives in the Greek, so that it could even be rendered literally as something like: “I will never, never leave thee, and never, never, never forsake thee.” Surely this is one of the greatest of God’s “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4). HMM

Thursday, November 10

Created to Rule the Day

“And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.” (Genesis 1:16)

It seems that throughout history, mankind has ignored or distorted the purpose for which God created the sun. Many cultures have even worshiped the sun, teaching that the sun was the source of all being, even human life. Temples were built in its honor, human sacrifices were made to appease it, whole civilizations were dedicated to its worship.

The nation Israel, which had lived among sun-worshipping Egyptians for centuries, was warned not to “lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and...[see] the sun, and...be driven to worship” (Deuteronomy 4:19) under penalty of death, “for the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24).

One of mankind’s primary purposes is to worship God, but the sun was created by God for man’s benefit. He is a God of grace and desires to “freely give us all things” (Romans 8:32).

The purpose of the sun is no mystery. Its Creator says that along with the moon and stars it is “to divide the day from the night...and...be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years...to give light upon the earth” (Genesis 1:14-15).

There will come a time, however, when the sun will no longer be needed by God’s people, for in our eternal home “there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light” (Revelation 22:5). “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23). Best of all, we shall be with Him. JDM

Friday, November 11

Words of Peace and Truth

“And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth.” (Esther 9:30)

The book of Esther is unique in that it contains no explicit mention of God. Yet, the hand of God is more evident in this book than in almost any other. It was after their remarkable deliverance from the genocide that had been contrived for them by Haman that Mordecai wrote his “words of peace and truth” to all the Jews, establishing an annual holiday to commemorate the providential winning of peace with their enemies, with the triumph of truth over evil and deception.

This incisive though unusual combination of words (“peace and truth”) was also used by Hezekiah when the Lord promised safety for his kingdom as long as he lived. “Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?” (2 Kings 20:19). Similarly, God promised His people delivery from their Babylonian captors: “I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth” (Jeremiah 33:6). Finally, through Zechariah, God promised His people a future lasting peace that they were to commemorate four times a year with “joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace” (Zechariah 8:19).

Men have longed for peace through the centuries, but it continues to elude them. After the so-called “war to end all wars,” Armistice Day was established to celebrate the lasting peace the war supposedly secured. Now, of course, it is called Veterans Day—still a day for honor, but hardly one of light and gladness. Peace can only endure in truth.

Although God was never named in Esther, He was there! Mordecai’s “words of peace and truth” implicitly spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ. There will only be real peace when men accept the real truth. HMM

Saturday, November 12

The Voice of the Lord

“The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.” (Psalm 29:4)

This solemn phrase, “the voice of the LORD,” occurs seven times in Psalm 29, centered especially on the awful judgment of the great Flood in the days of Noah. “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters” (v. 3). It occurs many other times in the Old Testament as well, with a wide variety of applications and circumstances.

The first time it occurs, however (and this is also the first occurrence of “voice” in the Bible, indicating thereby that it is God’s voice—not man’s—that we must hear if we seek guidance for life), is in the Garden of Eden immediately after man brought sin into the world. “And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden....And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:8-9). Mankind is lost and separated from God, but God calls unto each of us as He did to Adam, and we desperately need to hear His voice if our lives are to be fulfilled and spiritually fruitful.

In contrast to this scene of alienation, the final occurrence of a “voice” in the Bible is a beautiful scene of reconciliation when God again speaks to lost mankind, this time in glorious restoration of that broken fellowship. “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3).

To hear His voice then, however, we must first hear His voice now, through His Word. Jesus said, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life....the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (John 5:24-25). HMM

Sunday, November 13

Old Testament Love

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18)

Many people have mistakenly rejected or neglected the Old Testament on the basis that it speaks about a vindictive God of judgment in contrast to the New Testament God of love manifest in Jesus Christ. This perspective, however, is completely wrong.

One day a lawyer asked Jesus, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

Both of these commandments were recorded, of course, in the Old Testament. The first one in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is perhaps the most revered of all passages to the Jews: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” The second great commandment is the one in our text for the day. This law is buried deep in the Pentateuch, in the unlikely heart of the book of Leviticus. In the New Testament it is even called “the royal law” (James 2:8).

Thus, the great underlying theme of the Old Testament is love—love for God and love for others—and this truth is stressed by Christ Himself in the New Testament. Even greater is God’s eternal love that was ours from before the world and that will never end. “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:3). HMM

The Definition of Faith

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

The marvelous “faith chapter,” Hebrews 11, is an amazing chapter. Here, faith is defined not as some intangible wishfulness but as “substance” and “evidence.” Let us look closely.

First of all, faith must have a legitimate object, nothing less than the mighty Creator by whom “the worlds were framed” (v. 3) out of nothing but His omnipotent Word.

Beyond this, faith is further defined not by what it is but by what it does! The man of faith comes to God by “a more excellent sacrifice,” like that of Abel (v. 4), typifying the sacrifice of Christ. Faith will, like Enoch, live to please God (v. 5), and will, like Noah, prepare an Ark (i.e., do whatever necessary out of obedience to God) “to the saving of his house” (v. 7).

True faith will, like Abraham, go out as God leads, “not knowing whither he went,” even “dwelling in tabernacles” (literally “tents”) (vv. 8-9) if need be, as he looks for that city with sure “foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (v. 10). Such faith will even, like Abraham, offer up to God the greatest love and joy of his life, knowing that God will keep His Word (vv. 17-19).

Like Moses, the man of genuine faith will choose rather “to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (v. 25). Faith is even willing to be “stoned...sawn asunder...slain with the sword,” if need be, for the promises of God (vv. 37, 39).

We are saved by grace through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9), but since we are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10), our faith should motivate us to action. “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). HMM

Tuesday, November 15

The Grace of Being Content

*“And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.”
(1 Timothy 6:8)*

The last of God’s Ten Commandments—and probably the most difficult to obey—deals with the sin of covetousness. “Thou shalt not covet...any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Exodus 20:17). “Take heed, and beware of covetousness,” warned the Lord Jesus, “for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). This warning introduced His parable of the rich man whom God called a fool. “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

And how does one become rich toward God? “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven....Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on....seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:20, 25, 33).

We Christians—especially in an affluent society such as ours—all too easily fall into the trap of being possessed by our possessions and may even think these possessions are somehow God’s reward for our “godliness.” But Paul says those who suppose “that gain is godliness” are “destitute of the truth.” We need to remember that in God’s sight “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:5-6). And with Paul, we should strive to be able to say sincerely that “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

God has promised to supply all our needs (Philippians 4:19) if we are faithful stewards of what He has entrusted to us. Therefore, God’s Word commands: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). HMM

Wednesday, November 16

Asking and Receiving

“For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:8)

The tremendous resource of prayer is far too often neglected by far too many Christians. If nothing is standing between us and the Lord to keep us from asking effectively (sin, unbelief, selfish motives, etc.), then God has promised to act when we ask by giving us our request or something better. Note just a few of the many promises to those who ask:

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

“How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13).

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

Obviously, there are conditions. These marvelous promises assume that those who ask are abiding in His commandments, truly desiring His will, having His priorities, thinking His thoughts, and are asking in faith and in His name. HMM

Thursday, November 17

Son of God

“Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:3-4)

It is noteworthy that the identification of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is directly associated with His resurrection from the dead. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26), and since only God Himself can conquer death, Christ’s bodily resurrection is the conclusive affirmation of His unique deity: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Many others have claimed divine sonship, but all are dead—only Christ validated that claim by defeating death. “God...hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:33). “Death is swallowed up in victory....through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54, 57).

Jesus is explicitly called “the Son of God” about 44 times in the New Testament, only half as often as He is called “Son of man.” Nevertheless, this great truth is clearly taught in numerous other ways than by the use of the title itself. It’s so important that there is no salvation for the one who denies it. Jesus said plainly, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

Because He lives, we who believe on His name will also live forever! “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?...He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:5, 12-13). HMM

I Trust the Lord My Soul to Take

“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

The New England Primer was a popular Puritan tutorial taught to millions of young colonists. On one page is the familiar children’s prayer “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep; if I should die before I wake, I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take.” The repeated phrase “I pray thee” implies a troubling uncertainty, a questioning of Yahweh’s ability to guard the believer at all times—an uncertainty nowhere found in David’s DNA!

Psalm 4 is inseparably connected with Psalm 3, written when King David fled from his son Absalom (2 Samuel 15 to 18) and was also hunted by thousands of enemy Israelites. Even against these seemingly insurmountable odds, God’s elect finds unilateral protection in his Deliverer.

Two key verses balance this assuring theme. The image in verse 4b is of one meditating silently on one’s bed: “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” Verse 8, today’s text, closes with the image of sleeping in safety. Integrating these theological truths of the Almighty alters our children’s prayer to read, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I confidently trust the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I confidently trust the Lord my soul to take.”

Believer, you can trust Yahweh when you sleep because “I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me” (Psalm 3:5). You can also trust Yahweh when you are approaching death because “yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4).

Believer, let these truths pierce deeply into your saved soul so you can get a good night’s sleep! CM

Saturday, November 19

The Only Way

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

This is surely one of the best-known, best-loved, most important, clearest, yet most profound verses in the Bible. There is no other way to come to God except through Christ, no other truth than that which is founded and centered on Christ, and no other eternal life except the life of Christ imparted to the believer through faith in Christ.

All who teach otherwise are “thieves and robbers” of the soul, for Jesus said, “I am the door” (John 10:8-9). There is no other door to heaven and no other Shepherd of the sheep. He is the only “light of the world” (John 8:12) to illumine a world otherwise blackened by sin. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

He is “that bread of life...the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever” (John 6:48, 51), and there is no other such life-sustaining eternal food for the hungry soul.

Likewise, He is the “living water.” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37-38). No other water satisfies. He is also the one “true vine” in whom we must abide for fruit-producing life. He said, “For without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:1, 5).

The Scriptures have made it abundantly plain that there is “none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

There is no other way; the Lord Jesus Christ is the all-sufficient way, and the perfect way, to God. It is not that He shows the way; He is the way, and all who want to come can come to God through Him. HMM

Sunday, November 20

Our Hiding Place

“For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.” (Psalm 27:5)

There are times in the life of each believer when the trials become overwhelming and the whole world seems to be falling apart. Without the Lord, it would be impossible to escape, but with the Lord there can be safety and restoration, for He can be our precious hiding place until the storm is done.

There are many gracious promises to this effect in His Word, and we need only to claim them to experience them. The “pavilion” in our text is best understood as the tent of the commander-in-chief, well-protected and away from the battlefield. Surely, we are safe there. “Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues” (Psalm 31:20). There is a wonderful Messianic promise in Isaiah 32:2: “And a man [that man is Christ!] shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

There, sheltered from the storm, our gracious Lord gives comfort and sweet counsel until we are able to face the tempest victoriously. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust” (Psalm 91:1-2).

One of the most beautiful of these promises introduces David’s great song of deliverance: “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my Saviour; thou savest me from violence” (2 Samuel 22:2-3). HMM

Monday, November 21

The Names of the Men

“And these are the names of the men that shall stand with you: of the tribe of Reuben; Elizur the son of Shedeur.”
(Numbers 1:5)

These are the first entries in several long lists of names here in the book of Numbers—all names of men in the 12 tribes of Israel. We know nothing about most of these men except their names, so it’s natural to wonder why God had Moses include them in the inspired Scriptures.

In fact, this is one of the objections that skeptics and liberals have raised against the doctrine of verbal inspiration of the Bible. What possible spiritual or doctrinal or practical purpose could be accomplished through these lists of names for any future readers of the Bible?

And there are, indeed, many such lists of names. For example, the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles consist almost entirely of names. Then there are the lists in Ezra 2; Ezra 10; Nehemiah 7, 11, and 12; Romans 16; and others.

Information is included about some of these people, of course, and even the meaning of the names may warrant speculation about their parents’ hopes for the children.

But there is also another very cogent reason for God to have included all these names of relatively less significant people in His book. He wants to assure us that He is interested not only in the Abrahams, Daniels, Pauls, and other great men in His Kingdom, but also in the Elizurs and Shedeurs and Bills and Kates in His spiritual family.

There are many millions of names “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27), and the heavenly Lamb—the Lord Jesus Christ—is also the Good Shepherd that “callesh his own sheep by name” (John 10:3). The names in His book here on Earth are an assurance that He knows and calls us by each of our names in His book in heaven. HMM

Our Hope

*“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.”
(1 Timothy 1:1)*

Paul, in his opening salutation to Timothy, makes it clear that the Christian’s hope is not just in Christ but is Christ! In the New Testament, the term “hope” does not refer to some vague wish but to a confident expectation of something (or someone) sure to come. It focuses especially on the promised return of Christ to complete His great work of redemption.

It is specifically called the blessed hope. “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). It is also a living hope, for God the Father “hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

Furthermore, since Christ is our hope, it is a saving hope. “For we are saved by hope” (Romans 8:24). It is a glorious and joyful hope. It recognizes the present truth of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), so that we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2).

It is not a blind hope but a reasonable hope, one founded on solid evidence, and every believer must “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Finally, this hope of the imminent coming of Christ, when at last “we shall be like him,” is a purifying hope, for “every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). It is also a stabilizing hope, “which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Hebrews 6:19). In every way, God “hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace” (2 Thessalonians 2:16). HMM

Wednesday, November 23

Called Before Birth

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him.” (Galatians 1:15-16)

There is great mystery here. Paul was the human writer of much of the New Testament, yet he also claimed divine inspiration. “I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12).

It was only a short time before, however, that Paul had been bitterly opposing that gospel. “Beyond measure,” he said, “I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it” (Galatians 1:13). Eventually, he was converted and began to preach “the faith which once he destroyed” (Galatians 1:23). Yet, during all his years of fighting God’s truth, he had already been separated unto God and called by His grace even before he was born, as our text reveals. His teachers in the synagogue, his studies under Gamaliel, and even his anti-Christian crusades were all being orchestrated by God to develop Paul into the unique person he would be, the great Christian whom God could use to write much of His own written Word. Paul’s epistles were thus truly his epistles, derived from his own experience, research, study, reasoning, and concerns. At the same time, they came out as God’s Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, free from error and perfectly conveyed from God to man, because God had Himself ordained and planned all Paul’s experiences and abilities and had implanted all these concerns in his heart.

And so it was with all the human writers of the Bible. God’s Word (like Christ Himself) is both human and divine, yet meeting all our needs. This is mysterious indeed, but well within the capabilities of our omnipotent and gracious Creator. HMM

Giving Thanks for Christian Friends

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” (1 Thessalonians 1:2)

We all have much to be thankful for. It is certainly appropriate to give audible thanks for our daily bread, whether in private, at a family meal, or in public at a fine restaurant. In fact, Jesus set the example. When He miraculously fed the multitude beside the Sea of Galilee, He began with a prayer of thanksgiving. “He took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them....And they did all eat, and were filled” (Matthew 15:36-37).

It is good to give thanks for our food and shelter and clothing, but the blessing of having Christian friends is even more thankworthy. The first letter to the Thessalonians was possibly Paul’s first Spirit-inspired letter to Christian friends, and Paul began with a testimony of thankfulness to God for them (see the text above).

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he began similarly. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3), and to the Colossians he started the same way. “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Colossians 1:3). The same when he wrote his epistle to the church at Corinth. “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:4).

Even when writing to the Christians at Rome, whom he had not yet met personally, he wrote: “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all” (Romans 1:8). He also thanked God for his personal friends Timothy (2 Timothy 1:3) and Philemon (v. 4).

Throughout our Christian life journey, we develop lasting Christian friends and can thank God for all of them. What a blessing to have such friends, and how fitting it is to give God special thanks for them at this time. HMM

Friday, November 25

Abide

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)

As recorded in John 14 to 16, many of Christ’s last words to His disciples as He was about to leave them regarded abiding. The word *meno* occurs 18 times in this discourse and is translated not only “abide” but also “remain,” “dwell,” “continue,” and “be present.” Let us look at what He told them about abiding while He was “yet present” (14:25) with them.

First, “the Father...dwelleth in me” (14:10), “I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (v. 11). That is, they are one and the same, inseparably abiding together, giving great power to those believing on Him (v. 12).

Furthermore, the very Spirit of God, the “Comforter,” will “abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive...but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (vv. 16-17). “I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you” (v. 20).

Abiding in Him, as we see in our text and in verse 7 (as opposed to the tragic end of those who “abide not” [v. 6]), brings forth much fruit, and that fruit shall “remain” (v. 16).

There is one requirement—that we keep His commandments (14:23 and 15:10), and if we do so, we will “continue” and “abide” in His love (15:9-10). “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (v. 11). Not only are we to abide while in this world but throughout eternity. “In my Father’s house are many mansions [same root word, meaning abiding places]...I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (14:2-3). JDM

Four Commands

“Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” (1 Peter 2:17)

Our text today gives four commands for believers to obey, each of which is difficult but nonetheless “is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (v. 15). It comes in a lengthy passage (2:11–3:12) that discusses the matter of authority and a Christian’s proper response to it. Ponder each command:

Honor all men. This could be translated “Give honor to all.” While the verb is the same as in the last command, its verb tense is not the same, here indicating a continued, conscious choice to do this, while honoring “the king” indicates the development of a lifestyle of showing respect to civil authority. Evidently our day-to-day encounters with sinful “men” require us to be continually choosing to regard them with honor and dignity. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3).

Love the brotherhood. Our *agape* love—God’s kind of unselfish, undeserved love—should extend, on a habitual basis as seen in the verb tense, to all believers. “See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22).

Fear God. A lifestyle marked by a reverential fear of God is in mind here. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:7).

Honor the king. As mentioned above, this is to be a life’s commitment, continually recognizing the God-given authority of human government (1 Peter 2:1-14).

“Having your conversation [i.e., manner of life] honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (v. 12). JDM

Sunday, November 27

Eternal Things

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”
(2 Corinthians 4:18)

One of the most difficult handicaps for a Christian to overcome is spiritual nearsightedness. It is easy to see temporal things but hard to think on eternal things.

Paul, however, in the midst of an extremely busy and difficult temporal life, somehow did manage to keep his sights on that eternal life to which he was called. The wonderful redemption that Christ purchased for us with His blood is nothing less than “eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12); and therefore “he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). Consequently, as joint-heirs with Him, “they which are called...receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15). He is, surely, the “God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 5:10) and has there provided for us “everlasting habitations” (Luke 16:9).

All of these eternal things—eternal redemption, eternal salvation, eternal inheritance, eternal habitations, and eternal glory—are of infinitely greater value than the temporal things that crowd our minds and limit our goals. They are all a part of the wonderful eternal life we have already received through faith in Christ. It’s significant that the phrase “eternal life” (or “everlasting life,” which is the same Greek phrase) occurs no less than 44 times in the New Testament. God speaks of it often, and so should we!

The very first eternal thing mentioned in the Bible is the “everlasting covenant” God has made with all men (Genesis 9:16). The last is the “everlasting gospel” to be preached to all men (Revelation 14:6). HMM

Monday, November 28

Conformity

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29)

One of the greatest dangers facing Christians is the temptation to become conformed to the things of the world around them, thus destroying their testimony for the Lord. We are specifically commanded, in fact, “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). One cannot serve two masters, and the great privilege of the believer is the privilege of becoming conformed, not to a dying world, but to the living Christ.

But first we must be conformed to His death, dying to the world and its standards. The greatest desire of the apostle Paul was to “win Christ....That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:8, 10).

Death is far from the end, however. When Christ returns, He “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). In this verse, the Greek for “fashioned like” is the same as “conformed to.” These corruptible, dying bodies we now live in will one day be changed. As Christ rose from the dead, we also shall rise, and our bodies, like His, will be alive forevermore.

Even that wonderful prospect is not the best of it, however. Not only will our bodies be incorruptible like His, but we shall be like Him—like Him in holiness, like Him in love, like Him in wisdom. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). In the words of our text, we are actually predestined to be conformed to the very image of the Son of God! HMM

Tuesday, November 29

The Living Word/the Word of Life

“Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” (Philippians 2:16)

There is such beautiful correlation between the living Word (Christ) and the written Word (the Bible) that certain Scriptures could well apply to either one. Such is the case with our text. The Philippians were exhorted to hold forth the Word of life, which presumably could mean either Christ, the living Word, or else the Scriptures, which speak of eternal life.

The same dual meaning can be discerned in such texts as 2 Timothy 4:2 (“preach the word”) and Hebrews 4:12 (“the word of God is quick, and powerful”). In fact, there are many beautiful figures of speech that are applied in the Bible to the ministries of both Christ and the Scriptures in a believer’s life.

For example, Christ is “the light of the world” (John 8:12), but also “the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light” (Proverbs 6:23). Similarly, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35), but He also said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4).

The Lord Jesus Christ said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37). God also promised that “as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven,... So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth” (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Both are described as the very personification of truth. Jesus said, “I am...the truth,” and He prayed to the Father, “Thy word is truth” (John 14:6; 17:17). Finally, both must be received. “Receive...the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21), for “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). HMM

Wednesday, November 30

He Is Able

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” (Ephesians 3:20)

Despite man’s arrogant pride, he is utterly unable to save himself or to make himself acceptable to God. Neither is he able to keep himself saved nor, above all, is he able to defeat sin and conquer death.

But God is able! The word “able” (Greek *dunamai*) is closely related to the word for “power” (Greek *dunamis*), both speaking of God’s spiritual dynamics. He is all-powerful, His ability is without limit, and His power “works in us”!

Therefore, “he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:25). Because the gospel of Christ is the “power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16), God “is of power to stablish you according to my gospel” (Romans 16:25).

Even when great troubles and sorrows and temptations come, He is able. “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). He “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24).

In fact, He is able to meet every need of our lives and even to use us in His service. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Finally, “he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). *That* day will surely come, but then He will give us bodies of glory, for “he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:21). HMM

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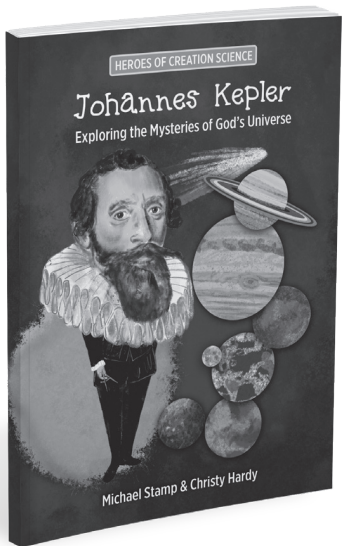
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