

Days of Praise

March • April • May 2016

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

March • April • May 2016

*“Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas,
and every thing that moveth therein.” (Psalm 69:34)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” (Proverbs 21:1)

Dear Christian friend,

This is the year when the United States of America finds out what God has in mind for a new series of leaders in our country. Yes, “we the people” are the instruments that God uses to implement His will, but it is absolutely true that “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1).

We are all instructed to pray for “all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:2). It is these men and women who have been commissioned as “the minister[s] of God” (Romans 13:4), and even if we did not vote for some of them, God is working a plan far beyond our time. We should trust Him!

As you read through these short devotionals, those of us who are privileged to write them for you have always prayed that each one will encourage you as you seek to serve our Lord Jesus and that you will find in each one the particular moment of contact with the Holy Spirit that will meet your needs for the day.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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Tuesday, March 1

The Daily Cross

“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

This same conversation and challenge is also recorded in Matthew 16:24 and Mark 8:34, except that only Luke included the term “daily.” Except for one brief reference in Matthew 10:38, this conversation marks the first explicit reference in the Bible to the practice of crucifixion, and it apparently assumes that the disciples were already well aware of this typically Roman method of execution.

“Taking up the cross” referred to the usual requirement that each condemned man haul his own cross to the place of execution. Jesus knew that He would soon have to be doing this Himself (John 19:16-17).

Christians sometimes use this phrase without appreciation of its true meaning, thinking of some burden (such as sickness or poverty) as “the cross” they must bear. Such things can be serious problems, but they are not instruments of execution, such as a cross. In effect, the Lord was telling His disciples that following Him must mean nothing less than a daily willingness to die for Him, if need be. As Paul would say: “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20); “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31).

Many disciples have indeed suffered martyrdom for Christ’s sake, but all should at least be willing to deny themselves daily. “Taking up the cross” does not necessarily mean dying as Christ did, but it does mean consciously dying each day to the world and living unto Him. For “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24) and gladly affirm this testimony: “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). HMM

Wednesday, March 2

The Unperfect Substance

“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”
(Psalm 139:16)

This is an amazing verse, testifying as it does to the omniscient fore-planning of our Creator for each human being. Each person has been separately planned by God before he or she was ever conceived; His eyes oversaw our “unperfect [not imperfect, but unfinished] substance”—that is, literally, our embryo—throughout its entire development. Not only all its “members” but also all its “days” (the literal implication of “in continuance”) had been “written” in God’s book long ago.

While modern evolutionists argue that a “fetus” is not yet a real person and so may be casually aborted if the mother so chooses, both the Bible and science show that a growing child in the womb is a true human being. Instruments called fetoscopes have been able to trace every stage of embryonic development, showing that each is distinctively human, never passing through any non-human evolutionary stages, such as the evolutionists’ theory of “recapitulation” would imply.

Not much is known about how a baby receives its soul, but the baby is surely an eternal human being from the moment of conception, with all its future days already well known in the mind of God, “when as yet there was none of them,” as our text points out.

But that is not all. All those who are saved (or, like the innocents who die before birth, “safe” in Christ) and whose names, therefore, are “written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8) are also predestined “to be conformed to the image of his Son” in the ages to come (Romans 8:29). HMM

Thursday, March 3

Living in the Real World

*“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.”
(Isaiah 65:17)*

People often think they are being practical when they place material values ahead of spiritual, emphasizing that we have to “live in the real world.” The fact is, however, that we are not living in the real world at all but in a world that is dying and will soon be gone. “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17). This is not even the world that God created, for that world was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Because “sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Romans 5:12), therefore, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22). In fact, this world is not even as it was soon after God’s curse, for “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6).

The present, post-Flood world is now under the dominion of Satan, who is “the prince of this world” (John 12:31) and of “all the kingdoms of the world” (Matthew 4:8). The Lord Jesus Christ came to “deliver us from this present evil world” (Galatians 1:4). As our text says, this world shall not even “be remembered, nor come into mind.” It “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

Therefore, we must “be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). We must “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12-13). In the meantime, our true citizenship, if we have been born again in Christ, is in the real world to come, and we are His ambassadors to an alien land (2 Corinthians 5:20). HMM

Friday, March 4

Fellowship in the Gospel

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.”
(Philippians 1:3-5)

This poignant letter was written to a church that Paul founded early in his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 16:12-15). He endured challenging opposition there, followed for days by a demon-possessed young girl, tossed into prison by an angry business community, beaten and locked immobile into wooden stocks (Acts 16:16-24).

Yet in that dark midnight, while Paul and Silas sang the hymns of the faith, God struck the jail with an earthquake and opened both the chains and the doors of the prison. The head jailor became converted, and along with the successful businesswoman Lydia, the seed of a flourishing church was planted (Acts 16:25-34).

It is to these “saints” and the “bishops and deacons” of the church at Philippi that Paul writes. The church has matured enough over the years of Paul’s absence to have established leadership and a strong testimony in that pagan city. The “remembrance” of these faithful men and women gives rise to his thanks to God for their “fellowship in the gospel.”

May we never take for granted the sweet friends that we have known in our churches. Their fellowship is far more valuable than business or political contacts. Theirs is the bond of an eternal brother or sister—theirs is the friendship that is “closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

The apostle John understood this: “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). And because we share in a love for the Lord Jesus, and walk together in the “light” of God’s truth, “we have fellowship one with another”(1 John 1:7). HMM III

Saturday, March 5

One God

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

This great verse has been recited countless times by Israelites down through the centuries, setting forth their distinctive belief in one great Creator God. The Jews had retained their original belief in creation, handed down from Noah, while the other nations had all allowed their original monotheistic creationism to degenerate into a wide variety of religions, all basically equivalent to the polytheistic evolutionism of the early Sumerians at Babel.

But along with its strong assertion of monotheism, there is also a very real suggestion that this declaration, with its thrice-named subject, is also setting forth the triune God. The name “LORD,” of course, is Yahweh, or Jehovah, the self-existing One who reveals Himself, while “God” is Elohim, the powerful Creator/Ruler. “Jehovah our Elohim is one Jehovah” is the proclamation. A number of respected Jewish commentators have acknowledged that the verse spoke of a “unified oneness” rather than an “absolute oneness.” The revered book called the Zohar, for example, even said that the first mention was of the Father, the second one the Messiah, and the third the Holy Spirit.

The key word “one” (Hebrew *achad*) is often used to denote unity in diversity. For example, when Eve was united to Adam in marriage, they were said to be “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Similarly, on the third day of creation, the waters were “gathered together unto one place,” yet this gathering together was called “Seas” (i.e., more than one sea, Genesis 1:9-10).

Thus, Israel’s great declaration should really be understood as saying, in effect: “The eternally omnipresent Father, also Creator and Sustainer of all things, is our unified self-revealing Lord.” HMM

Sunday, March 6

Breaking Bread

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.” (Matthew 26:26)

This is the first of 12 specific references to the “breaking of bread” in the New Testament, each reminding the participants of Christ’s sacrificial death. Although Paul had not been present at the Last Supper, he had evidently received a special revelation concerning it. “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed [literally, ‘while he was being betrayed’] took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:23-24). Similarly, drinking of the cup recalled to them His shed blood. All of this helped them remember and appreciate the great reality of eternal life imparted to them through His death, for He had said, “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life” (John 6:54).

For a while after His resurrection and their empowering by the Holy Spirit, “they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house” (Acts 2:46), seem to have combined each day this remembrance of the Lord’s supper with their own evening meals. Sometime later, it seems to have been “upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7).

There is no specific instruction in Scripture as to how often this breaking of bread should be observed, but when it is observed, the implied actions of “discerning the Lord’s body,” giving thanks to Him for His sacrifice for us, and “[judging] ourselves” (1 Corinthians 11:29, 31) are far more vital than the physical act of eating the broken bread. HMM

Monday, March 7

There Is a Fountain

“And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.” (Revelation 21:6)

Christian hymns were often written as deeply moving poems and later added to music. We dare not exegete hymns to discover spiritual truth, but we can use them as spiritual aids to help focus our scriptural study. One such old-time poem is the favorite “There Is a Fountain,” sung in churches today. Its five verses can inspire Christians. Verse one reads:

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.*

Before Jesus came, His unique birth was foretold by an angel and prophesied in Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel,” meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). He referred to Himself as “a well of water” (John 4:14) available to all.

The true understanding of the communion table, couched in the symbolic, precious words of Scripture (and our hymn), undergirds a lasting memorial to the work of Christ. “This cup is the new testament [i.e., covenant] in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance [i.e., a memorial] of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

The blood which was shed applies to believers, blessedly taking away our sin, for “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). A blessed truth indeed! JDM

Tuesday, March 8

The Dying Thief

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”
(Luke 23:42-43)

One of the most remarkable scriptural passages is that of the “deathbed” conversion of the sinful thief crucified with Jesus. Christ recognized his repentance, forgave his sin, and offered him eternal life as he died. As reflected in the hymn “There Is a Fountain,” salvation comes to sinners who repent, turn from their sin, and believe on Him, without any works involved or strings attached.

*The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.*

The “fountain” of blood flowing from the cross produces great rejoicing in those who have acknowledged His lasting work. “With the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19), we can be forgiven and born into His family. We receive the ability for and privilege of living victorious, holy lives. “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

All have chosen sin; all deserve judgment. “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). But because of Him, we can be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33). JDM

Wednesday, March 9

Thy Precious Blood

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: . . . And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” (Colossians 1:14, 20)

John introduced Jesus to the world at His baptism by saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He was known prophetically as a lamb even before then. “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). He fulfilled the lamb role in His sacrificial death for the sins of mankind: “With the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). The third verse of “There Is a Fountain” continues that picture.

*Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.*

The precious Christology passage of Colossians 1:13-20 identifies Christ as Creator, Redeemer, and King. As Creator, His redemptive work included the ransom of His creation, lost and shackled in sin. There will come the time when all of redeemed mankind will gather around His throne “saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

They will be joined by all in creation to sing His praises. “And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (Revelation 15:3). JDM

Thursday, March 10

Redeeming Love

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephesians 1:7)

Verse four of “There Is a Fountain” fills Christians with thankfulness for the great and lasting work accomplished on the cross. A never-ending stream of redeeming love has gushed forth from Calvary to supply our never-ending need for forgiveness and provision and love. We respond in love to Him for His abundant love framed in undeserved grace. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). And how can we do so? “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

*E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.*

Through propitiation, God was satisfied with the full payment for our sin. “The wages for sin is death” (Romans 6:23), but “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), and God, the holy Judge, is satisfied. “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared . . . which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4, 6-7). Little wonder we respond as we do.

Not only do we receive forgiveness from the Father, He looks at us as though we had fully obeyed Him as His Son had done. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past . . . Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 3:25; 5:9). JDM

Friday, March 11

Thy Power to Save

“O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvelous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.” (Psalm 98:1)

Throughout Scripture God accomplished glorious things, and His people responded in song. The final verse of “There Is a Fountain” reminds us that our song will last for eternity.

*Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing thy power to save,
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave.*

There will come a time when redeemed individuals will amass around the throne of God and His Son, our Redeemer, and sing a mighty song of praise to Him for salvation: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9). The Creator had bought creation back with His own blood.

The just and holy Creator was rejected by His creation and rightly pronounced the penalty of death. Yet He entered the created world to live a sinless life so that He could die as a proper substitute for all, and then rose from the grave in final victory over sin, offering us eternal life.

Our inability in this life to fully understand all that has transpired or even phrase a proper testimony will be replaced with an accurate assessment. We will gather there with all the saints to sing His praise: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). The great Creator became our Redeemer and our everlasting King! JDM

Saturday, March 12

The Limited Knowledge of Jesus

*“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”
(Mark 13:32)*

This verse has always been difficult to understand. If Jesus was God, how could He be ignorant of the time of His second coming? Indeed He was, and is, God, but He also was, and is, man. This is a part of the mystery of the divine/human nature of Christ. In the gospel record, we see frequent evidences of His humanity (He grew weary, for example, and suffered pain), but also many evidences of deity (His virgin birth, His resurrection and ascension, as well as His perfect words and deeds).

He had been in glory with the Father from eternity (John 17:24), but when He became man, “in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17), except for sin. As a child, He “increased in wisdom and stature” like any other human (Luke 2:52). Through diligent study (as a man), He acquired great wisdom in the Scriptures and the plan of God. After His baptism and the acknowledgment from heaven of His divine Sonship (e.g., Matthew 3:16-17), He increasingly manifested various aspects of His deity, but He still remained fully human.

With respect to the time of the end, this depends in some degree on human activity. For example, He said that “the gospel must first be published among all nations” (Mark 13:10), and only God the Father could foresee just when men will have accomplished this. Although the glorified Son presumably now shares this knowledge, in His self-imposed human limitations He did not.

In no way does this compromise His deity. In our own finite humanity, we cannot comprehend fully the mystery of the divine/human nature of Christ, but He has given us more than sufficient reason to believe His Word! HMM

Sunday, March 13

Promised Performance

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

Our Lord gave this powerful promise to perform the good work that He began at and with the church at Philippi (the “you” is plural in the Greek text).

It is an earthly, temporal promise; that is, the promise is to “perfect” the good work “until the day of Jesus Christ.” The church at Philippi closed its earthly doors centuries ago. Something much more than mere continuation is pledged.

Surely our Lord has in mind His assurance that “the gates of hell” would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18), but there were some churches to whom Christ spoke who were in danger of losing their “candlestick” or church-hood (Revelation 2:4; 3:16). What, then, can we be assured of by this marvelous promise?

Perhaps the basic “good work” that our Lord refers to is seen in the list of commendations given to the seven churches in the letters dictated to John at the beginning of Revelation. All except Laodicea had some strengths. Even troubled Sardis had a “few names” not yet sullied and “things which remain” that were still good and worth preserving (Revelation 3:1-4). Our Lord knows all His works “from the beginning” (Acts 15:18) and sees the eternal fruit of our ministry that ripples long beyond our short earthly life (Revelation 14:13).

There is also the mystery of our being “builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22)—a “spiritual house” that produces “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). All of this, perhaps, is what our Lord had in mind when He promised to perform the good work He had started in Philippi. HMM III

Monday, March 14

Defense of the Gospel

“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.” (Philippians 1:7)

Writing from prison in Rome some 10 years after he helped found the church in Philippi, Paul still felt such a bond with those believers that he insisted they “partake” with him in his “defence and confirmation” of the gospel ministry.

The key words here are “defense” (Greek *apologia*) and “confirmation” (Greek *bebaiosis*). Both words are not common in the New Testament text. Together, they describe a mission attitude that should anchor our approach to ministry.

Apologia, in its various forms, is most often translated “answer.” Peter used this term in a passage that urged Christians to be “ready always to give an answer [as in, an answer that is logically sufficient] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Paul used *apologia* twice to the Philippian church; both times stressed the “defence of the gospel” (Philippians 1:17).

Bebaiosis and its associated terms convey the meaning of firmness, or having been established. Paul encouraged the Colossian church to be “rooted and built up in [Christ], and stablished in the faith” (Colossians 2:7). Peter tells us to “make [our] calling and election sure [same word, *bebaiosis*]” (2 Peter 1:10).

Thus, our witness and declaration of “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16) must be “with logic” (*apologia*) to defend the precious truth, and with an eye to “establish” (*bebaiosis*) that truth in the mind and heart of those newly converted. The gospel tells who Christ is (the Creator, the incarnate Word, and coming King) as well as what He did on Calvary. HMM III

Tuesday, March 15

God's Tear Bottle

“Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” (Psalm 56:8)

This is a remarkable insight into the tender heart of our heavenly Father. He has a tear bottle—in fact, perhaps a tear bottle for each of His wandering children.

Ancient “tear bottles” (or wineskins) have actually been excavated by archaeologists in Israel. These vessels were used to catch and preserve the owner’s tears during times of grief or extreme pressure. This psalm was actually written by David when he was being pursued by Saul on one side and surrounded by Philistines in the city of Goliath on the other. David apparently not only had his own tear bottle, but also believed that God somehow was also storing up David’s personal tears in His own heavenly bottle of tears.

There is a touching story in the earthly ministry of Jesus that provides another example: “Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, . . . and anointed them with the ointment” (Luke 7:37-38).

The ointment was obviously not the same as the tears, but followed the washing by tears. Some scholars think these tears came from her bottle, which was emptied on His feet and used to wash them. Others think that those tear bottles that have been found actually contained the collected tears of mourners at a burial site.

In any case, God does know all our wanderings and sorrows and all our tears, and stores them up somewhere. Perhaps it is also a metaphor for His “book of remembrance,” which is being “written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Malachi 3:16). HMM

What the Creator Requires

“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?” (Deuteronomy 10:12)

In the final weeks before his death, Moses gathered the people of Israel together for a final look back at God’s miraculous provision for the nation and a restatement of the Law. He repeated the Ten Commandments and reminded them of their supernatural origin (chapter 5). He charged them to remember the Law and to pass it on to their children, for God Himself had entrusted it to them (chapter 6). He insisted that they utterly destroy the enemies of God in the land, for their holy and special status as the people of God would be in jeopardy if they didn’t (chapter 7). The longest section of the speech consisted of a command to remember their unique history: how God had supernaturally intervened for them on so many occasions (8:1-10:11).

Finally, Moses brought them to a time of commitment, charging them, in our text, to fear, obey, love, and serve the “LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” Even the commandments were for their good (v. 13); they were not merely petty or malicious. In fact, throughout the lengthy lecture, Moses had several times adjured the people to love their Lord with their entire being (see 6:5; 7:9; 10:20; 11:1, 13, 22).

And why not? “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is” (10:14). The God who placed His sovereign mark on Israel (v. 15) deserved their total devotion, obedience, and service.

Does not the Creator God, who has done so much more for us than He had done even for Israel, deserve our total devotion, obedience, and service? JDM

Thursday, March 17

No Fear in the Days of Evil

“Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?” (Psalm 49:5)

This enigmatic question should be a real concern to elderly unbelievers—or of unbelievers of any age, for that matter. The “days of evil” seem specifically to refer to old age, as in Ecclesiastes 12:1, which exhorted young people to “remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

Those who have not “remembered their Creator” while young may one day come to realize that the iniquities which had been accumulating against their record day by day through a long lifetime had actually involved the venom of that old Serpent, which God long ago had warned would bruise the heels of the children of Mother Eve (see Genesis 3:15). Their sins, which will eventually become so numerous as to “compass them about,” might even destroy them both now and eternally. After all, the devil will have “the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14) until that day when the true seed of the woman the Lord Jesus Christ (even though His own “heel” has been viciously “bruised” by Satan when the sins of the whole world were placed upon Him) will “crush the head” of that wicked one forever.

But because of Christ’s great victory over Satan—when He both died for our sins and then defeated death by His resurrection—we need no longer fear death, even when the evil days draw nigh.

Though it is far better to accept His gift of salvation from sin and death while we are young, it is never too late, as long as we live. So, “wherefore should I fear in the days of evil?” “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and . . . perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:16, 18). HMM

Be Sure

“But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32:23)

Most things in this life are uncertain; nevertheless, there are some things about which we can be absolutely sure. Just as God warned Adam that if he disobeyed His Word, he would “surely die” (Genesis 2:17), so He warns us that we can be sure our sins will ultimately be exposed. “The foundation of God standeth sure” (2 Timothy 2:19).

On the other side of the coin, we can also be sure of God’s mercy and faithfulness, and we can be sure of the truth of His Word. “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). We also can be sure of His promised salvation. “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Hebrews 6:19). Thus, we can, through faith and patience, show “the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Hebrews 6:11).

Finally, we can be sure that our Lord Jesus, who came once to die for our sins, will come back again to complete His work of redemption and reconciliation. The very last promise of the Bible consists of His gracious words: “Surely I come quickly” (Revelation 22:20).

However, each of us must first make sure that we believe His sure Word and have appropriated this sure hope. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10-11). We can be sure that our sins must be judged, but we also can be sure of His forgiveness, if we believe His sure promises and receive His sure salvation. HMM

Saturday, March 19

Love's Longing Prayer

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.” (Philippians 1:9)

Paul's longing for the Philippian church is eloquently expressed in his prayer for their maturation in the faith. It begins simply with a prayer for their growing love—love that will “abound yet more and more.” This phrase is only used two other times: in 1 Thessalonians 4:1 and 10. Essentially, the prayer is that their love would never stop increasing.

The focus of the ever-increasing love, however, is not emotive reactions or depth of feeling. It is a nonstop, ever-growing love for “knowledge” and “judgment.” And as one might expect, the Holy Spirit's choice of words is important.

Several Greek words could be translated “knowledge.” This specific choice in Philippians 1:9 is *epignosis*, a term that emphasizes understanding of facts or truth and carries an intensive meaning with a fuller, clearer, more thorough knowledge than mere awareness of data. A person with *epignosis* knows both what and why they have certain facts.

“Judgment” is the translation of *aisthesis*, an unusual term that demands perception, understanding, and discernment of what to do with the knowledge. Both terms are intellectually based and require a growing grasp of information. But both are the product of love—not human standards of high intelligence.

We must be “rooted and grounded in love” (Ephesians 3:17), speak “the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), and always be conscious of our relationships so that we “increase” the “edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

Finally, there is this overarching statement: “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). HMM III

Sunday, March 20

The Price of Sparrows

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” (Matthew 10:29)

This fascinating bit of first-century pricing information, seemingly so trivial, provides a marvelous glimpse into the heart of the Creator. Of all the birds used for food by the people of those days, sparrows were the cheapest on the market, costing only a farthing for a pair of them. In fact, they cost even less in a larger quantity, for on another occasion Jesus said: “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?” (Luke 12:6). The “farthing” was a tiny copper coin of very small value, so a sparrow was all but worthless in human terms.

And yet the Lord Jesus said that God knows and cares about every single sparrow! God had a reason for everything He created; each kind of animal has its own unique design for its own intended purpose. Modern biologists continue to waste time and talent developing imaginary tales about how all these multitudes of different kinds of creatures might have evolved from some common ancestor. Even some evolutionists have started calling these whimsical tales “just so” stories. They would really be better scientists if they would seek to understand the creative purpose of each creature rather than speculating on its imaginary evolution.

The better we comprehend the amazing complexity and purposive design of each creature, the better we realize the infinite wisdom and power of their Creator. Then, all the more wonderful it is to learn that their Creator is our Father! He has placed them all under our dominion, and we need to learn to see them through His eyes if we would be good stewards of the world He has committed to us. We can also thank our heavenly Father that we “are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:31). HMM

Monday, March 21

The Good Part

“But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42)

The sisters Mary and Martha both loved the Lord Jesus and wanted to please Him. Jesus also loved them (John 11:5) and apparently was an occasional guest at their home in Bethany. Martha evidently felt that activity and service were pleasing to the Lord (and these, indeed, are good and important), whereas Mary simply “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” (Luke 10:39). To Martha’s surprise and chagrin, Jesus said that Mary had chosen the “good part”—a part more important even than service and food.

Long, long before, the patriarch Job, whom God had said was “a perfect and an upright man” with “none like him in the earth” (Job 1:8), had also chosen that good part. “I have esteemed the words of his mouth,” Job said, “more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

We today can sit at Jesus’ feet and hear His Word only by reading and meditating on the Scriptures. Important as our daily responsibilities may be to meet our material needs and those of our families, we should make priority time available for this “good part.” The same surely applies especially to Christian leaders. They may have many important tasks to perform in the service of God, but it is still more important for them to take time to “hear His word” in the Scriptures.

The unknown psalmist who wrote the grand 119th Psalm had learned this truth: “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. . . . How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding” (Psalm 119:97, 103-104).

We today have a higher privilege than Job, or the psalmist, or even Mary, for we have all the Scriptures! If we truly desire “that good part,” the Lord will surely provide the time, as He did for Mary. HMM

Tuesday, March 22

Love's Product

“That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:10-11)

Knowledge and judgment that are motivated by love (Philippians 1:9) are directed very carefully to certain end products that will fulfill our Lord's design and desire for His adopted sons and daughters while they are still on Earth.

A repository of facts can be nothing more than a curiosity, and is often an arrogant distraction. A growing intellectual ability must be useful. It is no different in God's kingdom. Our knowledge and judgment must be used to “approve things that are excellent.”

Paul's challenge to the Roman church was that they use their minds to “prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2). To his young son in the faith, Paul insisted that Timothy study to show himself “approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

The “proving” (testing, affirming) has a twofold goal: that our life on this earth would be “sincere and without offence” and that we would be “filled with the fruits of righteousness.” Purity and productivity are earthly spiritual goals that are reiterated many times in the Scriptures. They, of course, are mere reflections of the holiness that our Lord creates in us when we are born again (Ephesians 4:24), but they are nonetheless an often-repeated demand for those of us who claim a kinship with Christ Jesus.

The Bible sums it up this way: “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16). HMM III

Wednesday, March 23

Moses and Elijah

“And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:30-31)

This is a mysterious passage. Peter, James, and John watched in awe as Christ was “transfigured” before them as Christ had promised (Mark 9:2). But how could Moses and Elijah be there? Moses’ body had been buried by God in an unknown tomb in Moab some 1,500 years before, and no resurrection had yet taken place (Deuteronomy 34:5-6; 1 Corinthians 15:22-23). Elijah had been taken alive into heaven in a chariot of fire over 900 years previously (2 Kings 2:11).

The fact is that this whole experience was a remarkable vision! Jesus said, after it was over: “Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead” (Matthew 17:9). Although they had just been awakened out of sleep (Luke 9:32), the disciples knew this was not a dream. All three had seen it together and “were sore afraid” (Mark 9:6).

This vision of the future kingdom was for the disciples’ encouragement (and for ours, as well), for the Lord had just been warning them of His coming death, as well as the cross which they, themselves, must take up to follow Him (Luke 9:23). The kingdom of God would come on Earth, in all its future power and glory. But first, He must die and rise again, and they must be His witnesses of these things.

But when He did return in glory, there would be two groups of people sharing His glory with Him: Moses representing the resurrected saints, and Elijah the “raptured” saints. “The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). HMM

Thursday, March 24

Jesus' Prayer of Thanksgiving

"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." (Luke 10:21)

When the Lord Jesus was here on Earth, He was, among other things, "leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). One aspect of that example, no doubt, was His prayer life. He prayed and gave thanks before He fed the multitude (Matthew 15:36) and also when He ate with His disciples at the last supper (Luke 22:19). It is surely right, therefore, that we should give thanks in prayer before each meal, whether in a small group as with our family or in a large public dining place.

Jesus spent much time in prayer. On at least one occasion, He "continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12), and no doubt a goodly portion of His prayer was thanksgiving prayer, as well as intercession. But there seems to be only one specific item of thanksgiving by Him actually recorded in Scripture, and that is the item in our text. (The same is also given, verbatim, in Matthew 11:25, so we can infer that the Holy Spirit considered it very important.)

That is this: the wonderful truths of salvation and forgiveness—eternal life in heaven and God's guidance and provision on Earth—are easily understood by the simplest among us, even by little children, even though they often seem difficult for "the wise and prudent" to comprehend.

Many are the intellectuals who can raise all kinds of objections to God's revealed Word and His great plan of creation and redemption and who, therefore, will end up eternally lost. Many are the simple folk and children who just hear and believe and are saved. "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." HMM

Friday, March 25

When Messiah Came

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.” (Daniel 9:25)

This remarkable prophecy, given through the angel Gabriel to Daniel the prophet, actually predicted the date of the coming of Christ nearly 500 years in advance. From the announcement to the coming of “Messiah the Prince,” there would be 69 “weeks” (literally “sevens,” meaning in this context “seven-year periods”). That is, Messiah would come as the Prince 483 years after the commandment was given to rebuild Jerusalem. There is some uncertainty about the exact date of the decree, as well as the exact length of these prophetic years, but in each calculation the termination date is at least near or, in some cases, exactly the time when Christ entered Jerusalem to be acknowledged as its promised King.

However, Gabriel’s prophecy went on to say: “And after [the] threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off” (Daniel 9:26). That is, although He would come as promised, instead of being gladly crowned as King, He would be slain. Since the 483-year period terminated long ago, it is clear that Messiah must already have come and then been put to death at that time.

The terms of this remarkable prophecy have been precisely fulfilled in Jesus Christ alone, and no one coming later could have done so. It is no wonder that He wept over Jerusalem, pronouncing her coming judgment, “because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:44).

We, like He, should weep and pray for Israel. Yet, in God’s omniscient planning, “through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles” (Romans 11:11), and in this we can rejoice. HMM

Reporting on the Parables

“And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.” (Mark 12:1)

This parable of the vineyard had an obvious meaning, for even “the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders” to whom He was speaking (Mark 11:27) “knew that he had spoken the parable against them” (Mark 12:12). The same parable and the events surrounding it are reported in Matthew 21:33-46 and Luke 20:9-16.

But there is another question that has been raised about this parable, as well as all the other parables that have been reported in two or more different gospels. That is, if the Bible is inerrant in its very words as Jesus taught (e.g., Matthew 5:18; John 10:35), then why did the writers often vary in their reporting of the words of the parable?

It should be remembered, however, that Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic, whereas the written accounts were in Greek. Furthermore, two of the writers (Mark and Luke) were not present at the time, so would have to obtain their accounts from someone who was there (e.g., Luke 1:1-2). Flexibility in translation and reporting is always possible with different translators and different reporters.

The doctrine of divine inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16), however, applies not to the process but to the result. The Spirit of God was free to use the writer’s own research, vocabulary, and style in reporting an event, so long as there were no factual errors or irrelevancies in the final result. In fact, such minor differences often give greater depth and credence to the reported event since they help in proving that the different writers were not in collusion but simply telling of a real event from different perspectives. HMM

Sunday, March 27

Risen with Christ

*“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”
(Colossians 3:1)*

The wise believer revels in the fact of Christ’s resurrection. Some things in Scripture may be easier to identify with and apply, including Christ’s substitutionary death, but it is the resurrection that gives us power to live victoriously. “Like 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).

We have been “crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed” (Romans 6:6). Nevertheless, we are risen with Him, as our text and elsewhere (Romans 6; Ephesians 2:1-10; etc.) clearly teaches. This resurrection is an inward one, of course, but our bodily resurrection is also guaranteed by Christ’s bodily resurrection, should we physically die. “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:14).

Power to serve Him effectively comes through His resurrection, for we have access to the “exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19-20). We have authority over all human and demonic institutions through Him who even now operates as head of the living church of His followers.

Perhaps the most precious of all benefits of the resurrection is that “we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens” who is sympathetic to “the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16). JDM

Monday, March 28

Filled with Fruit

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:11)

The unique phrase “fruits of righteousness” has many supporting teachings, the most famous of which is where the Lord Jesus compares Himself to a “vine” and we who are His adopted sons and daughters to “branches” (John 15:1-6).

Paul reminded the Philippian church that the fruits ultimately result from Jesus Christ, just as Jesus illustrated. We “cannot bear fruit” by ourselves (John 15:4). Not only does our very life come from God, but the ability to produce godly fruit can only come through and by God.

Isaiah noted that all of our self-produced righteous deeds are like “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). The fruit for which we are “ordained” (John 15:16) has its source in the thrice-holy Godhead and its manifestation by the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).

Those Holy Spirit character traits are the innate property of the vine that becomes instilled in the branches, or us. This enables us to bring forth the fruit that represents the “DNA” of the vine in which we are abiding. Being connected to the vine makes it possible for us to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

The “husbandman” (God the Father) is superintending the vineyard (John 15:1). When branches wither and do not produce fruit (see also Matthew 13:18-23), they are taken away. The branches that do produce are purged (Greek *kathairo*, “cleaned up”). As Peter noted, “his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). With God, “all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). Without Him, “[we] can do nothing” (John 15:5). HMM III

Tuesday, March 29

Remembered through All Generations

“I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.”
(Psalm 45:17)

The 45th Psalm is a beautiful Messianic psalm, speaking prophetically of the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the psalm is quoted by the writer of Hebrews, calling Him “God” and promising not only eternal remembrance but also everlasting dominion: “But unto the Son, he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom” (Hebrews 1:8, citing Psalm 45:6).

But the writer also said He would be remembered in all generations. That has proved true, so far! As others have frequently noted, this man lived on Earth only 33 years, never traveled more than a few miles from His home, never wrote a book, never raised an army, never ruled over so much as a village let alone a kingdom, never married or had children, never enrolled for any formal education, and finally was executed as a criminal.

Yet He has, indeed, been remembered through all generations following His all-too-short career two thousand years ago—and remembered with love and deep reverence and gratitude by millions of people in all nations ever since. Furthermore, though He never wrote a book, others have written innumerable books about Him, while another psalmist assured us that His words would also be preserved “from this generation for ever” (Psalm 12:7).

And all this has come to pass! Herein is a marvelous thing! Indeed, He was, and is, God and this was demonstrated by His flawless character, His amazing teachings, His unique miracles, His volitional, sacrificial death, and His mighty defeat of death itself by His bodily resurrection and ascent into heaven. HMM

Wednesday, March 30

The Transfiguration

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.” (Matthew 17:1-2)

This remarkable transfiguration of Christ was shown to the three disciples so that they could actually “see [Him] coming in his kingdom” (Matthew 16:28), as He will do someday when He returns to Earth “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). This would ever afterward be an unforgettable experience that would strengthen the disciples for their critical future ministry.

James would become the first martyr, but his brother, John, would survive to bear the testimony far and wide for almost 70 more years. “And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). Peter also wrote of the amazing event: “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. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Peter 1:17-18).

It is therefore very significant that the word “transfigured” (Greek *metamorphoo*) is also applied to Christian believers in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed [read ‘transfigured’] into the same image from glory to glory.” That is, as we behold the glory of Christ in the mirror of the Scriptures, we ourselves are spiritually being metamorphosed into His own image. The marvelous transformation will be completed when He does come again and “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). HMM

Thursday, March 31

Other Preachers

“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” (Philippians 1:18)

This verse seems to conflict with warnings about false teachers (2 Peter 2:1) and another gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The key is identifying what Paul is allowing on the one hand and condemning on the other.

Some teachers of his day (probably both in Philippi and in Rome) appeared to be taking advantage of Paul’s imprisonment to enhance their own reputations. Indeed, some were trying through their public preaching to “add affliction to [his] bonds” (Philippians 1:16).

Even though some with ungodly motives stood out among those preaching of “good will,” Paul was able to rejoice that “Christ is preached” (today’s text) by both categories, and therein is the source of the “power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16).

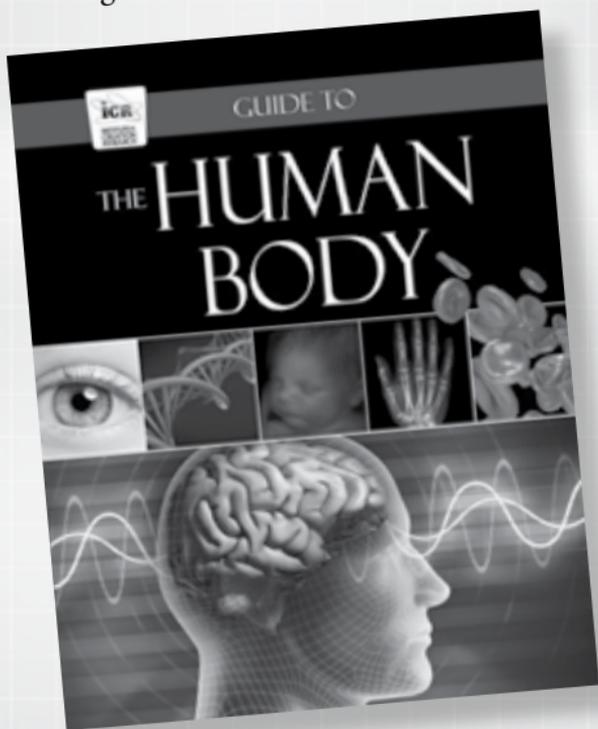
The stern denunciation of “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6) exposes the untruth of all hybrid messages, whether human or angelic, that would attempt to preach anything other than “Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Here is the message for us. When the full gospel of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection—according to the Scriptures—is preached (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) by whatever means and even under sometimes questionable motives, the “good news” is cause for rejoicing. It is the gospel that has power, not the messenger.

However, when some people attempt to change that gospel to make it seem more attractive to those who wish to continue in sin, or change its message to allow for human works, we are to see such preachers as dangerous and under condemnation. May God keep us from both mistakes. HMM III

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Friday, April 1

His Own Place

“And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” (Acts 1:24-25)

The last three words of this passage have profound significance. Although Judas had walked with Christ and the other apostles for three years, he was out of place there all that time. It took the traumatic events of the final week of Jesus’ ministry to reveal his true character.

At death, each of us will go to his own place, whether heaven or hell. If a person has found the company of Bible-believing, Bible-living Christians uncomfortable in this life and feels more at home with the Bible-doubting, God-ignoring majority, then his own place will surely be with them in the future life. Such a person would be more miserable in heaven than in “his own place.” The tragic words of the Bible’s final chapter are these: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (Revelation 22:11).

An artificial profession of belief, like that of Judas, will not change one’s basic character. Sooner or later, that person will be found altogether out of place. “The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22). Yet a true change of heart, through genuine faith in Christ, will change our eternal residence, as well, for then God “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

There is, indeed, a wonderful “place” that Christ has gone to “prepare” for all those who truly desire to be with Him in His place! (John 14:2). HMM

Saturday, April 2

Love or Lust

“My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge.” (Proverbs 5:1-2)

The entire fifth chapter of Proverbs concerns the use or misuse of the highest function of our physical bodies. Under the sovereign control of Almighty God, a man and woman have been granted the ability, through their union, to make an eternal human being with the ability to accept or reject God, eternal life, and forgiveness. The contrast in this chapter is between the usage of this God-given function in lust or love, adultery or fidelity.

Verses 3 through 6 provide insight into the character of promiscuity, which includes deception (v. 3) and sorrow (v. 4). Psychologists have long recognized that many prostitutes ply their trade out of a hatred for men, purposefully and conscientiously destroying their companions (v. 5). The solution, of course, is to stay away. Don't play with fire! Avoid any opportunities to be enticed (v. 8). The results, of course, of yielding to temptation would be that we would lose our youthful vigor (v. 9), our wealth (v. 10), our health (v. 11), our self-esteem (vv. 12-13), and even our lives are in danger (v. 14).

On the other hand, married love is a beautiful thing (vv. 15-20), providing health, companionship, joy, and satisfaction. “Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth” (v. 18).

Remember, none of this is done in secret. “The ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings” (v. 21). We should stay away from any involvement in sin, for sin entraps us (v. 22), and we keep going back. Men die for lack of instruction, or lack of obedience to the instruction they have (v. 23). This leads to great folly, and, in the end, total shame and destruction. JDM

Sunday, April 3

The Father of Spirits

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Hebrews 12:9)

Human parents transmit physical characteristics to their offspring, but our spiritual attributes come from God, for He is “the Father of spirits.” Paul recognized that all men are “the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29) and that each man is still “the image and glory of God” (1 Corinthians 11:7).

Thus, our spirit/soul nature, as distinct from our body of physical/mental flesh, has come from God, who created it and united it with our body, evidently at the moment of physical conception in the womb. It is obvious that the “image of God,” man’s spirit/soul nature, could not be transmitted genetically via the “genetic code” and the DNA molecules, for these are simply complex chemicals programmed to transmit only the physical and mental attributes of the ancestors to the children. Nevertheless, the spirit/soul attributes of each person also seem to be associated inseparably with the body from conception onward, continuing so until separated again at death, when the spirit goes “to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8), leaving the body behind.

In the meantime, however, the “image of God” in man is marred by its incorporation in man’s “sinful flesh,” for “the body is dead because of sin” (Romans 8:3, 10). By this union of flesh and spirit, man inherits Adam’s fallen nature as well as his mortal body, and both are in need of salvation. Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity” (Titus 2:14). Therefore, we, like Paul, can pray that our “whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). HMM

Monday, April 4

Life by Death

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21)

This profound confidence comes at the conclusion of a threefold summary of Paul’s experience while serving the Lord Jesus, as well as his deep bond with the church at Philippi. The “salvation” of which Paul speaks references victory in this life as much as the eternal rescue at the end.

Initially, the confidence comes “through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:19). Christian leaders covet the prayers of those with whom they serve. Twice, Paul specifically asked the Thessalonian church to pray for him (1 Thessalonians 5:25 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1). Most of us are familiar with the promise that the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Should we be surprised when such prayer brings boldness?

There is also the experience that the “supply” of the Spirit of God engenders faith. God’s providential care, experienced during the testing of our life, produces a growing hope and confidence (Romans 5:4-5). It is most often true that we learn more of God’s faithfulness in times of need than in times of plenty.

Then there is an “earnest expectation and . . . hope” that result in “boldness” (Philippians 1:20). Growing confidence in the Lord’s provision and protection undergirds an anticipation for God’s direction and wisdom. Expecting something to happen is the flip side of hope. Experience in kingdom work brings spiritual joy and peace (Romans 15:13).

Thus, the confident statement “now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:20-21). HMM III

Tuesday, April 5

Pleasant Perplexities

“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” (Philippians 1:23-24)

As we mature in the Lord, our fear of death recedes into the background and ultimately, as this verse demonstrates, becomes a desire to leave this sin-cursed world behind and pass into the presence of the Creator.

The word choices in this passage are unusual. The verse could be translated “I am held together out of two pressures, a passion to be loosed to be with Christ; which is very much more serviceable for me: but remaining here in the flesh is, out of necessity, more critical for you.”

Thus, the tension of the true saint of God. The more that is known about the joy awaiting us in the presence of our Lord, the less we see earthly values and goals as things to work toward. Yet the needs of churches, new Christians, troubled souls, and challenges surrounding our lives require a commitment to complete the “course” that God has given us to finish (2 Timothy 4:7).

The Lord Jesus insisted that we not worry about tomorrow because the evil of each day was “sufficient” (Matthew 6:34), since there is trouble enough in the world among those who reject God’s authority (2 Timothy 3:1-7). The evil that surrounds us should motivate us to long for the eternal rest promised to the people of God (Hebrews 4:9).

But to struggle with conflict resolution among the churches adds to the burden. Many in the ministry know this tension, as do most who serve regularly in their own churches. Perhaps our own peace comes when we finally determine that it is “far better” to serve. HMM III

Wednesday, April 6

Becoming the Gospel

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”
(Philippians 1:27)

The Greek word translated “conversation” emphasizes “citizenship,” with all of its attendant loyalties and expectations for appropriate behavior. The structure of the introductory word “only” indicates that it is an adjective, not an adverb. Thus, the opening phrase could be rendered, “Your only citizenship must be lived out so that it becomes the gospel.”

The New Testament employs three different Greek terms that are translated “conversation.” *Anastrepho* is best understood as “dwelling” or “remaining” in a certain place: “Put off concerning the former conversation,” we are commanded in Ephesians 4:22. *Tropos* stresses the manner of life, perhaps implying the reputation one gains by the lifestyle: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example” (Jude 1:7). *Politeuo*, the term used by Paul in our text, conveys citizenship: “For our conversation is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20, *politeuma*). The emphasis of our text is on our lifestyle and testimony as “ambassadors” in a foreign land (2 Corinthians 5:20). As such, we are to live in a manner that “becometh” the gospel—“that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Ephesians 4:1).

We are to stand fast in a unity of one spirit with one mind. Paul closed his letter to the Philippians with this: “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved” (Philippians 4:1). HMM III

Thursday, April 7

On Being Faithful

“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (Titus 1:9)

It is important to note that the adjective “faithful” can be applied both to people and to things, if they are believable and trustworthy. Our text above refers to the Word of God as being faithful. Obviously, if any teacher of the Word is to hold fast the faithful Word and teach sound doctrine, he too must be faithful. Paul also teaches that church leaders should have “faithful children” (Titus 1:6) and that their wives should be “faithful in all things” (1 Timothy 3:11).

The Greek word translated “faithful” is closely related to the words “faith” and “believe.” The same relationships are even stronger in the corresponding Hebrew words used in the Old Testament. It is vital to believe God’s faithful Word for indeed “faith cometh by . . . the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

But genuine faith and faithfulness are not common commodities. “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6). The one man who is absolutely believable and trustworthy, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. “If we believe not [that is, are unfaithful], yet he abideth faithful” (2 Timothy 2:13). In the Bible’s climactic book, He is even introduced as “the faithful witness” (Revelation 1:5). Among His closing words, He promises that “these sayings are faithful and true” (Revelation 22:6).

We can have absolute confidence that all His promises will be fulfilled, and all His warnings must be heeded. May God help each of us also to be—like Christ and like His Word—faithful and true. Remember also that they that are truly “with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14). HMM

Friday, April 8

The Living Word

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

This is the great verse of the Incarnation, declaring to us that the Creator of all things, the eternal Word of God (John 1:1-3) actually became a man, being “made flesh” (our text). Since this verse and the following verses unequivocally refer to “Jesus Christ” (v. 17), there is no legitimate escape (though many have tried) from the great truth that the man called Jesus of Nazareth was the great God and Creator, as well as perfect man and redeeming Savior. Furthermore, He has assumed human flesh forever, while still remaining fully God. He is Immanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

He is not part man and part God, or sometimes man and sometimes God, but is now the God-man, fully and eternally true God and perfect man—man as God created and intended man to be. See also Philippians 2:5-8 and 1 John 4:2-3.

When He first became man, He “dwelt among us” for a while. The word “dwelt,” however, is actually the Greek word for “tabernacled.” As in the tabernacle (or “tent”) prepared by Moses (Exodus 40:33) in the wilderness, the glory of God in Christ dwelled on Earth for a time in a “body” prepared by God (Hebrews 10:5). We also “beheld his glory,” says His beloved disciple, John. The Greek word for “tabernacle” (*skene*) is a cognate word to *shakan* (the Hebrew word for “dwell”), both being related to what has come to be known as the Shekinah glory cloud that filled the ancient tabernacle (Exodus 40:34).

Eventually, when the Holy City descends out of heaven to the new earth, then “the tabernacle of God” will forever be “with men,” and He will “dwell with them” and “be their God” eternally (Revelation 21:3). Thus, God’s “Living Word” is now and always our living Lord! HMM

Saturday, April 9

Pleasures at God's Right Hand

"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)

The 16th Psalm contains the Bible's first reference to the resurrected Christ at the "right hand" of His heavenly Father, and this is important, for there are 20 other such references that follow this one. "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psalm 110:1). This latter verse is quoted no less than five times in the New Testament (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; Hebrews 1:13).

Then there are seven references to Christ being at God's right hand in Paul's epistles (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2), and seven in other books of the New Testament (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55-56). Lastly, "[Jesus Christ] is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1 Peter 3:22). It is noteworthy that the first reference speaks of Christ's great joy at God's right hand; the last, of His great power there.

One additional activity there is mentioned: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34). In fact, His continual intercessory ministry on our behalf is His main activity in God's immediate presence during this present age (note Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2; etc.).

Soon He will become God's strong right hand of power, manifested until all His enemies become His footstool and we, His people, are taken up to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Then we shall enjoy with Him the pleasures and fullness of joy at God's right hand forevermore. HMM

Sunday, April 10

Privileged Suffering

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Philippians 1:29)

Paul wrote in the previous verses that we are to conduct ourselves as though our only citizenship was worthy of the gospel message that we proclaim, and that in doing so we should be committed to a mindset held together by the Holy Spirit. Then, he encouraged us not to be “terrified by your adversaries” (Philippians 1:28).

Such adversaries—from the devil himself (1 Peter 5:8) to business (Matthew 5:25) and family problems (Luke 12:13)—are part and parcel to those who would “live godly in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:12). We should not be surprised when such challenges come; rather, we should be alarmed if all men “speak well of you” (Luke 6:26).

Curiously, Paul wrote that we are “gifted” (Greek verb *charizomai*, same idea as the related noun *charis*) with this privilege, in the interests of our Lord Jesus, to “suffer for his sake.” The apostles understood this paradox as they left the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41).

Peter wrote that we should follow the example set for us by the Lord Jesus, “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). In fact, we should “rejoice” when asked to share in the same kind of sufferings that our Lord endured, and whenever we are “reproached for the name of Christ” we should be happy, “for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you” (1 Peter 4:14).

Privileged suffering indeed! James wrote that we should “count it all joy” (James 1:2) when we are tested. Those times increase our faith and allow us to demonstrate our allegiance to Christ. HMM III

Monday, April 11

Remember His Benefits

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”
(Psalm 103:2)*

The benefits of the Lord are, indeed, great and marvelous, and it would be an act of ingratitude not to remember and appreciate them. Note the following partial list in this psalm:

1. *Forgiveness.* “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities” (v. 3). God forgives all! He “cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).
2. *Healing.* “Who healeth all thy diseases” (v. 3). The greatest and ultimate disease is that of aging and death, but one day “there shall be no more death” (Revelation 21:4).
3. *Redemption.* “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction” (v. 4; see also 1 Peter 1:18-19).
4. *Glorification.* “Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (v. 4).
5. *Provision.* “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things” (v. 5; see also James 1:17).
6. *Strength.* “Thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (v. 5).
7. *Protection.* “The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed” (v. 6).

The greatest benefit of all, of course, is the gift of salvation, by the mercy of God. Note the testimonies of God’s mercy: “Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (v. 4). “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (v. 8). “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him” (v. 11). “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him” (v. 17).

Infinite as the universe, enduring as eternity—these are the dimensions of God’s mercy! “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (v. 12). No wonder this great psalm both begins and ends with the inspiring exhortation: “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” HMM

Tuesday, April 12

Bible Authority

“Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” (Proverbs 30:5-6)

The Bible is unique among all books. Not only is it different in its form, structure, and history, but it takes the position of supernatural superiority to all other communication. It insists on total accuracy for its content and absolute obedience to its commands. No other book is so demanding. The whole of the Bible abounds with the teaching that it has “given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

It is the word of God the Father. Jesus made it clear: “I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (John 12:49).

It was confirmed by the Holy Spirit. “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

It is the source of faith and salvation. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

It is not to be changed. “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

It is the instrument by which “a young man [can] cleanse his way . . . by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9). It is to be revered and obeyed, “for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psalm 138:2). “Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4). HMM III

Wednesday, April 13

When . . . Then

“Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.”
(Deuteronomy 7:9)

Moses knew Israel would tend to succumb to various temptations in the Promised Land and encouraged them not only to obey God’s law but to use temptations as an opportunity for growth in character. Standing on the border, he proposed three “when . . . then” situations and exhorted the people to decide in advance how they would react.

“When the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land . . . to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, . . . Then beware lest thou forget the LORD” (6:10, 12). Moses knew that a satisfied people, recipients of easy wealth, would forget the Lord. The remedy: “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name” (v. 13), and “ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God” (v. 17).

Next, “when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies . . . which the LORD our God hath commanded you?” (v. 20), the fathers were to instruct them with: “The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand” (v. 21). “And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive” (v. 24).

God also knows our tendencies to compromise, and “when the LORD thy God . . . hath cast out many nations before thee, . . . thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; . . . Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; . . . For they will turn away thy son from following me” (7:1-4).

In these and other situations, we would do well to follow Moses’ exhortation and decide beforehand how we will react. JDM

Inspiration

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Bible insists its writers were supernaturally influenced by God to such an extent that their words were given divine accuracy. The unique word translated “inspiration” in our text could be rendered “God blowing” or “God puffing.” Peter speaks of “holy men of God” who “spake” as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). David was conscious that his own “tongue” was speaking words that the Holy Spirit of the Lord gave him (2 Samuel 23:2). Jeremiah was given audible instruction and told to reproduce those words precisely (Jeremiah 30:1-2; 26:2), as was Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8-10), who clearly knew he was being controlled by God (Isaiah 59:21).

These are samplings of some 2,600 claims in the Old Testament for direct inspiration of the text of Scripture. God used several methods to make sure that His word was “puffed” out, and on one occasion even wrote them with His own finger on tables of stone—twice (Exodus 31:18; 34:1). Those words were not only inspired but inscribed!

The writings of the 27 books of the New Testament are also full of declarations of God’s personal inspiration of the words. Jesus claimed to speak only what God the Father instructed Him to say (John 12:46-50). Paul knew he was given revelation (Ephesians 3:3-4) and insisted on equivalent standing with God’s commands (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Peter demanded remembrance of the apostles’ teachings (2 Peter 3:1-4, 15-16), John insisted on the accuracy of what he shared (1 John 1:1-3), and Jude verified the words of the other apostles (Jude 1:3, 17).

It seems we are confronted with an all-or-nothing proposition. Either all Scripture is inspired or none of it is. HMM III

Friday, April 15

The Trumpet of God

“And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.” (Exodus 19:19)

This is the first reference to trumpets in the Bible, and it is significant that the “voice” of the trumpet was coming not from man but from God. The setting was the awesome scene at Mount Sinai, when the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments for His people.

The last reference in the Old Testament to trumpets again refers to God’s trumpet. “And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the LORD God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south” (Zechariah 9:14).

The trumpet, as used in Israel (Hebrew *shofar*), was made of ram’s horns and was used on many important occasions. One of the most notable was when the Israelites finally entered the Promised Land at Jericho. “So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and . . . the wall fell down flat, . . . and they took the city” (Joshua 6:20). These were human trumpets, of course, but they were sounded with the authority of God, and God gave the victory.

We also today can speak with the authority of God if we speak His Word plainly and clearly. But “if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Corinthians 14:8).

We ourselves may soon hear the trumpet of God, for the return of Christ is drawing near. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven . . . with the trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). As we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, we (like John long ago) will hear a voice “as it were of a trumpet,” saying, “Come up hither” (Revelation 4:1), and then “shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). HMM

Saturday, April 16

Christ the Son of God

*“And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”
(Romans 1:4)*

The opening verses of Paul’s epistle to the Romans stressed that the gospel of Christ was actually the fulfillment of that “which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures” (v. 2). This promise was centered in God’s eternal Son who had promised to redeem the world from sin and death.

To do this, He must become a man, “made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (v. 3), yet He also must be sinless in both nature and practice before He could become God’s perfect sacrifice for sin. He must be perfect man—man as God intended man to be. He must be a “second Adam,” created without sin, yet He must not fail as did the first Adam, being “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

He must, therefore, be miraculously conceived. “A body hast thou prepared me” (Hebrews 10:5)—a perfect body unblemished either by inherited mutations or by a sin nature inherited from His parents. Then, for nine months, His body would grow, finally to be born of the virgin and to live a life “holy, harmless, undefiled” until that perfect, sinless man could be made “one sacrifice for sins for ever” (Hebrews 7:26; 10:12).

But how would the world ever know that all of this was really true? How could lost sinners be assured that their Creator had now become their Redeemer?

By His resurrection from the dead—that’s how! He has been “declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead” (today’s text). Jesus Christ is “that man whom he hath ordained”; and of this we can be sure, because “he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). HMM

Sunday, April 17

The First Day of the Week

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” (Acts 20:7)

Given the fact that everything about God’s Word was specifically inspired by its Author, it is appropriate that this important phrase, “the first day of the week,” occurs exactly eight times in the Bible. The first six of these (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19) all stress the fact that it was on this day that the greatest event in history (since the creation) had taken place. The creation of the universe had taken place on the first day of the week, and now its Creator had conquered sin and death itself on that day. In the Bible, of course, the number “seven” represents completeness, so “eight” represents a new beginning—a new creation, a resurrection.

The last two references tell us just how the early Christians remembered this day. Our text verse tells us this was a day on which the disciples assembled together, had a preaching service, and then “broke bread.” This was not a special assembly called just for Paul, for he had already been waiting there six days (see previous verse). This was about 25 years after the resurrection itself, and the Jewish believers were evidently still observing the seventh day as a rest day, but then they also observed the first day of the week as the time to commemorate the Lord’s death in “breaking of bread” to celebrate His resurrection, and especially to hear the preaching of His Word. The final reference tells us one other vital thing they did: “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him” (1 Corinthians 16:2). The first day of the week should always be a time of remembering Him in these joyful ways, for He is our living Lord and Savior. HMM

Monday, April 18

The Living Savior

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9)

There is a popular Christian song whose chorus ends with these words: “You ask me how I know He lives; He lives within my heart.” This may sound spiritual, but this is not how we know He lives! We are saved because of the objective fact that He died for our sins and then rose bodily from the tomb, triumphant over sin, death, the Curse, and Satan, alive in His glorified body for evermore. It is this which we must believe in our hearts and confess with our lips. For Him to rise bodily from the grave means that He is nothing less than God, the very Creator Himself. It is only because of who He is that He could do what He did, and this is what we must believe in our hearts.

There are people who believe that Buddha lives in their hearts, or the spirit of “the gods” indwells their hearts, or even that “the Christ” is in their hearts, but “the heart is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17:9). We can believe many things and feel many things that are not so. We know Jesus Christ is a living Savior, not because we feel His presence in our hearts, but because He rose from the grave on the third day and “shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days” (Acts 1:3). The gospel of our salvation does not rest on our feelings, nor on someone’s teachings, but on the objective, proven, certain facts of history. Jesus Christ is alive, whether anyone feels Him living in their hearts or not, and He is at this moment bodily in heaven at the right hand of the Father (e.g., Romans 8:34).

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). HMM

Tuesday, April 19

God Is Spirit

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)

Mankind has always struggled with this aspect of God. The Second Commandment prohibited any attempt to represent God by any physical shape (Exodus 20:4-5). The triune God cannot be contained by finite attributes.

- “Now unto the King eternal, *immortal, invisible*, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:17)
- “Who only hath *immortality*, dwelling in the light which *no man can approach unto*; whom *no man hath seen*, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.” (1 Timothy 6:16)

Were it not for the Second Person of the Godhead, He whom the apostle John identifies as “the Word,” we would have no possibility of knowing God (John 1:1-14). Philip asked to see the Father, and the Lord Jesus replied: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

But how can this be? Paul explained to the Philippian church that Jesus Christ emptied Himself, took on the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7). Our Lord Jesus, our Redeemer and Savior, the same Creator who spoke the worlds into existence, “was made flesh” (John 1:14) in order to provide all that was necessary for the thrice-holy God to “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

Jesus insisted “no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44). Salvation is not possible unless “he that cometh to God [believes] that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus Himself told the Samaritan woman, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” HMM III

Wednesday, April 20

God Is Holy

“Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

The awesome vision of the throne that God gave Isaiah included a short description of the seraphims. They stood above the throne announcing, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). They are cited again in Revelation 4:8 constantly saying, “Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

Apparently, the holiness of God is all-consuming.

Both the Hebrew and Greek words for “holy” used in Scripture are strong descriptions of separateness, a dedicated detachment from all else. “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy” (Revelation 15:4). “There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God” (1 Samuel 2:2).

It is this absolute and unique transcendence that sets the Creator of the universe above and beyond all others: “For I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me” (Isaiah 46:9). Although there are “gods many, and lords many” (1 Corinthians 8:5) and the “desperately wicked” heart of man (Jeremiah 17:9) twists the “glory of the incorruptible God” (Romans 1:23) into every vile image possible, “Jesus Christ [is] the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Since God is holy, you and I can trust Him without reservation or doubt. “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Since God is holy, we can be totally confident that our souls are secure in God, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). HMM III

Thursday, April 21

Opening the Ear

“Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.” (Psalm 40:6)

That Psalm 40 is primarily a Messianic psalm speaking mainly about the work of Christ is evident from its quotation as such in Hebrews 10:5-10. The psalm is prophesying particularly of His incarnation, as He says: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me” (Psalm 40:7).

Burnt offerings and sin offerings had indeed been required from God’s people under the law, but these were not an end in themselves. These sacrifices were meaningless unless they were offered out of a willing heart, obedient expressions of submission to a forgiving God.

That was the implication of the “opened ear,” a symbolic expression indicating one’s willingness thenceforth to hear only the voice of his master and to submit to His will in all things. If a freed bondservant “shall plainly say, I love my master . . . I will not go out free: Then his master shall . . . bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever” (Exodus 21:5-6). This was the testimony of the coming Messiah, as reported in our text.

Then note its application as recorded in Hebrews 10:5: “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.” That is, the phrase “mine ears hath thou opened” is translated by the Holy Spirit as “a body hast thou prepared me.” The perfect submission of the Son to the Father required that He become a man, with a very special human body prepared by His Father. Then Psalm 40:7 becomes (in Hebrews 10:7): “Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God. . . . By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:9-10). HMM

Friday, April 22

Accepted in the Beloved

“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Ephesians 1:6)

This wonderful verse assures that all who have been saved by God’s grace have been “accepted” by the Lord. However, this is not just a marginal acceptability. The Greek word occurs only one other time in the New Testament, and there it appears in the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary. “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28). That is, we are not merely accepted, we are highly favored by God!

This is not because of our own personal merits, of course. It is because God sees us as in His Son; He loves us because He loves Him, and we are in Him.

Although Christ is called God’s “beloved Son” seven times in the New Testament (each time directly by the Father Himself), there is only one other time when He is spoken of simply as “the beloved.” This is in Matthew 12:18 (quoting Isaiah 42:1), “Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him.”

The love of God the Father for His beloved Son is the root source of every other love in the universe, for it is the one love that is eternal. “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). This is what it means to be highly favored in the beloved! This was the prayer of Christ on His way to Gethsemane the night before He went to the cross.

We who are in Him are predestined to be with Him in glory, to behold His glory, and forever, as redeemed sinners saved by grace through faith, to be “to the praise of the glory of his grace” (today’s text). HMM

Saturday, April 23

Buried with Him

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like 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)

The burial of Christ after His death was extremely important for two reasons. First, it assures us that His death was a physical death and that His resurrection was a bodily resurrection. Second, His burial—like His death and resurrection—has profound doctrinal and practical significance for the believer’s individual life.

All this is pictured, as our text points out, by the ordinance of baptism, displaying symbolically the death of Christ for sin and the death of the believer to sin, then the burial of the corruptible body of flesh (which, for all but Christ, returns to dust in accordance with God’s primeval curse). And finally, the resurrection, demonstrating Christ’s eternal victory over sin and death, and, in the case of the believer, the beginning of the new life in Christ.

The same truth appears again in Colossians 2:12: “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” Although these are the only New Testament passages where the doctrinal implications of Christ’s burial are specifically mentioned, the spiritual truths taught thereby permeate all the Scriptures. If our old bodies of sin are—at least positionally—already in the grave, then it is altogether grotesque for them still to be walking around in sin. “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Romans 6:5). We shall (not “should,” as misleadingly rendered in our text) walk in newness of life, triumphant daily over sin through the implanted resurrection life of our victorious Savior. HMM

He Knows

“I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.” (Revelation 2:19)

Seven times in the letters to His seven representative churches in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord Jesus says: “I know thy works” (Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). Whatever we are doing—or not doing—He knows!

Sometimes such knowledge can bring—or at least should bring—great consternation. He knows, for example, all our hypocrisies: “I know . . . that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Revelation 3:1). He also knows when our outward display of religious activity masks a real heart-attitude of compromising self-interest. “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot” (Revelation 3:15).

Yet He also knows when our service is genuine and our testimony is God-glorifying and faithful. “I know . . . thy labour, and thy patience. . . . I know . . . thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith” (Revelation 2:2, 13).

Of these seven testimonies of His knowledge, the central one is in our text. He knows when we really love Him, for the “charity” mentioned is nothing less than *agape*, or unselfish love. He knows all about our sincere “service” and true “faith” in His Word, as well as our “patience” of hope.

Perhaps the most precious of His assurances, however, is that to the suffering church at Smyrna. “I know thy . . . tribulation, and poverty” (Revelation 2:9). When He says that He knows, the sense is that He understands, because He has been through it all Himself. Therefore, “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16). HMM

Monday, April 25

God Is Omnipotent

“Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee.” (Jeremiah 32:17)

The Genesis record of creation generates more hostility among men than any other message. Even secular atheists claim to respect the humanitarian teachings of Jesus, but they bristle irrationally when the Lord Jesus is identified as the Creator. Perhaps this is because the evidence for God’s omnipotence is displayed so openly and vividly by the “greatness of his might” (Isaiah 40:26).

The God who can speak the billions of galaxies into existence with the “breath of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6) is a God who can cast ungodly men into eternal hell for their defiance and rebellion against “the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4). Conversely, the God who “stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing” (Job 26:7) is able to “save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:25).

No wonder the psalmist expresses the praise that all men should declare: “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness” (Psalm 145:3-6).

When the Lord Jesus was formally invested at the great assembly around the throne, the entire throng burst into the song “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). Each of us would do well to carry that song in our hearts every day. HMM III

Tuesday, April 26

The Watchers

“I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven.” (Daniel 4:13)

It is only in this chapter of Daniel (see also verses 17 and 23) that certain angelic beings called “watchers” are mentioned. Whether the term applies to all God’s holy angels or only to a certain order of angels has not been revealed in Scripture.

However, we do know that at least some of the angels, if not all of them, are intensely occupied with observing events among humans here on Earth. For example, Paul said that he and the other apostles had been made “a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Corinthians 4:9).

The word “spectacle” in this verse is actually “theatre” and is so translated the only other time it is used in the New Testament (Acts 19:29, 31). It is sobering, as well as surprising, to realize that Christians—especially Christian leaders—are on a stage, as it were, being carefully watched by an audience which even includes the angels.

Paul also cautioned Christian women to maintain a covering on their heads “because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:10). Perhaps the watching angels are also included in the great “cloud of witnesses” who observe us as we “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

But why should these mighty angels, these “holy ones,” these heavenly “watchers,” have such a “desire to look into” these things here on Earth (1 Peter 1:12)? Perhaps they are anxious, like us, to “see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:9-10). HMM

Wednesday, April 27

Christ the King

“Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.” (1 Timothy 6:15)

Of the many descriptive titles of the Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps the most significant is that of King, because this speaks of His universal dominion. The day is coming when “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Philippians 2:10).

First of all, since He created all things, He is the King of creation. “For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land” (Psalm 95:3-5).

In a special sense, of course, He is the King of the Jews. “He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:33).

He is also our King of redemption, having set us free from the kingdom of the wicked one. He “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

There is a day coming in which all the kings of the earth shall unite against Him. “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14). “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron. . . . And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:15-16). Until then, let us serve Him as King, and submit to Him as Lord. HMM

Thursday, April 28

The Oracles of God

“Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?”
(Romans 3:2-3)

This striking synonym for the Scriptures (“the oracles of God”) occurs just three times in the Bible. In our text, Paul is emphasizing the great privilege and responsibility that was committed to the Jews when God gave His “oracles” to them, a word implying “divinely inspired utterances.”

Then the author of Hebrews rebuked those Hebrew Christians who had still not learned the very “first principles of the oracles of God,” despite having been professing Christians for a long time (Hebrews 5:12). Finally, the apostle Peter urged his readers: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11). That is, anyone who presumes to speak for the Lord must “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2). It is not our words, but His words that are “quick, and powerful” (Hebrews 4:12). In fact, Stephen called them “the lively [or ‘living’] oracles” (Acts 7:38).

In all these references, it is clear that these “oracles of God”—that is, the Holy Scriptures—constitute the very utterances of the living God. They were given to and through believing Jews and are preserved for us now in our Bibles. They obviously should be believed, studied, obeyed, and proclaimed by all who consider themselves to be Christians.

The fact that many people reject the Bible, even claiming it is wrong in what it teaches, is irrelevant. Such claims merely display human arrogance. God’s Word has been “for ever . . . settled in heaven” and “is true from the beginning” (Psalm 119:89, 160). It will endure even after this present world has passed away (Matthew 24:35) and will finally be the criterion by which its detractors will be judged in the last day (Revelation 20:12; 22:18-19). HMM

Friday, April 29

God Is Omniscient

“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” (Acts 15:18)

Although the concept of absolute knowledge is general to almost all ideas of God, it is perhaps the most difficult for any human being to understand. Most of us work very hard to obtain knowledge and, in most cases, even harder to retain it. The practical issue with this teaching is we forget that God does not forget!

“The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works” (Psalm 33:13-15). Deep in the heart of every man is the fear that God’s omniscience is very real, but we spend much of our waking hours attempting to override that concern.

Yet the Scriptures are absolutely clear. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: . . . and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12). “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

Ah, but the wonderful and encouraging side of God’s omniscience is that He does know. “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether” (Psalm 139:1-4).

With that kind of knowledge, it is no wonder that “my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). HMM III

Saturday, April 30

Jehovah

*“And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.”
(Hebrews 1:10)*

The primary name for God in Scripture is the majestic name Jehovah, occurring nearly seven thousand times. The early Jews were reluctant to use that name, for fear of using it lightly (Exodus 20:7), and substituted the word *Adonai* (meaning Master or Lord) in its place. Our English versions have followed suit, using the term “LORD” for Jehovah (small or all caps to distinguish it from *Adonai*, or Lord). Thus, the name Jehovah appears only four times in the King James and causes us at times to miss the full impact of the passage.

This is especially true in the New Testament quotations from Old Testament passages which used the name “Jehovah” for which “Lord” has been substituted. Now, in the English versions, the name “Lord” appears. If “Jehovah” (i.e., deity) were read instead, much richer meaning would be gathered, and it would prove beyond a doubt the full deity of Christ. Consider two examples.

First, our text quotes from Psalm 102:25-27. The entire psalm consists of praise to Jehovah, and here in Hebrews it addresses the Son. If we read “thou, Jehovah, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth” and realize that Jesus is the subject of the passage, we recognize that Jesus can be none other than the Creator God.

Also, in Matthew 3:3, where John the Baptist fulfilled his prophesied role by teaching “Prepare ye the way of the Lord,” quoting from Isaiah 40:3, we see Jesus equated with the Jehovah of the Old Testament, for Isaiah uses the term LORD, or Jehovah.

In these and many other examples, we see Christ as the Jehovah Jesus and that the Lord of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New Testament. JDM

Sunday, May 1

Bruising the Devil

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” (Romans 16:20)

This is an intriguing promise, suggesting that believers can somehow inflict bruises on the devil, who is perpetually seeking to “devour” them (1 Peter 5:8). This promise is a clear allusion to the primeval assurance of Genesis 3:15, when God promised that the unique “seed” of “the woman” would eventually “bruise” (actually “crush”) the head of the old serpent, the devil. This prophecy will finally be fulfilled in Christ’s ultimate victory, when Satan first will be bound for a thousand years in the bottomless pit and then confined forever in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:2, 10).

In the meantime believers, who also in a sense are the woman’s spiritual “seed” (Revelation 12:17), can repeatedly achieve local and temporary victories over Satan and his wiles by resisting him “stedfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9). If we resist him as Jesus did, with relevant Scripture, then God promises that he will “flee from you” (James 4:7). Such local victories can be obtained over these dangerous teachers whom Satan is using (note Romans 16:17-19, just preceding today’s text) “shortly” in this manner, but we need to be continually alert against his recurrent attacks. The ultimate victory over Satan, of course, will be won only by the Lord Jesus when He returns, and we must “be sober, be vigilant” (1 Peter 5:8) until that time.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we must perpetually “wrestle . . . against the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Ephesians 6:12), who will be casting “fiery darts” (v. 16) against each believer. Finally, with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (v. 17), we can even by God’s grace inflict spiritual wounds on Satan himself! HMM

Monday, May 2

Son of the Living God

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

This ringing affirmation of faith came from Peter as spokesman but undoubtedly was shared by all the disciples, since Jesus had asked the question “Whom say ye that I am?” of them all. Actually, they had probably all been disciples of John the Baptist, who had directed them to Jesus, and so had heard John’s testimony concerning Christ’s identity. John had said that Jesus was indeed “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18).

Yet, as they had been following Him, they had heard Him speak of Himself far more often as “the Son of man.” Over 30 times in the gospel of Matthew alone He identified Himself as Son of man, not once as the Son of God. Nevertheless, He accepted Peter’s statement as absolutely true, saying that the Father had so revealed it.

In fact, it is essential that one must believe it to be saved. Jesus did say: “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).

Yet He seems to want us to know Him especially as the Son of man, perhaps so that we will never forget that He, though God, is also man just like us. And as man, He was “in all points [tested] like as we are, yet without sin” so He can “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and we now can “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

John was enabled to see Christ once again, long after His return to heaven. Although He was now in His resurrection body, John still saw Him as “one like unto the Son of man” (Revelation 1:13). Although He is indeed the Son of the living God, He is also our “man in the glory”! HMM

Tuesday, May 3

God Is Love

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love.” (1 John 4:16)

It is said that the most quoted verse in all the Bible is the passage in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Surely that is a magnificent testimony to the love God has for us, and without it none of us would know God. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

But God “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity” (Hebrews 1:9). How is it that God “commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)? “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Human love is usually reciprocal. That is, we love if and when we are loved in return. Yet those of us who are twice-born are commanded to love each other, and the godly husband is expected to love his wife like the Lord Jesus unilaterally loved the church. But that kind of love is not normal—it is God’s love in us. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7).

The English word “love” in its various forms appears over 700 times in the Bible. The vast majority of those references do not attempt to describe God’s love. They focus either on our responsibility to “love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deuteronomy 6:5) or “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8).

Evidently, we experience God’s love when we are saved and are under obligation to show it as we “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). HMM III

Wednesday, May 4

The “Shall Nots” of John’s Gospel

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

There are many wonderful promises to the believer listed in the gospel of John. Many of these promises are things which “shall” happen, but let us consider seven of these which teach of things which “shall not” happen to the believer whose trust is in Christ.

Teaching of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Christ said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (4:14).

Similarly, “Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (6:35).

Furthermore, He taught: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (8:12). Our deepest needs are met in Him.

Having once believed, we are placed into His family and He promises, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (10:28). In Him, we are utterly secure. Why? “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” (5:24).

Consequently, we have no fear of death. “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (11:25-26).

As the familiar verse in our text tells us, if we only believe “that he gave his only begotten Son,” we shall “not perish, but have everlasting life.” JDM

Thursday, May 5

Mercy and Truth

“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” (Psalm 85:10)

The words “mercy” (Hebrew *cheded*, also often translated by “kindness” or “lovingkindness”) and “truth” (Hebrew *emeth*) occur more often in the psalms than in any other book. In fact, “mercy” occurs more in the psalms than in all the rest of the Old Testament put together. Though at first these two concepts seem opposed to each other (for how can God’s truth, which abhors sin, be compatible with His mercy, which forgives sin?), nevertheless they are “met together,” for “his salvation,” according to the previous verse, “is nigh them that fear him” (v. 9).

“Mercy and truth” (or “lovingkindness and truth”) are brought together at least 16 times in the Old Testament, including 10 times in the psalms. And when God’s eternal truth can be united with His loving mercy, both mediated through His Holy Word, there is great blessing indeed! “All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies” (25:10). “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” (138:2). The first time the phrase is found in the Bible is in the prayer of Abraham’s servant, thanking God for “his mercy and his truth” (Genesis 24:27).

God’s mercy and truth, of course, are really met together only in Jesus Christ, through whom God can both “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). He is “our peace” (Ephesians 2:14) and is “made unto us . . . righteousness” (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is “the truth” (John 14:6) and will show in the ages to come “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). HMM

Friday, May 6

God Is Triune

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”
(Matthew 28:19)

The foundational plank of Israel’s worship was Deuteronomy 6:4—“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.” Even the great apostle James acknowledged, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19).

Some have suggested that the Old Testament does not teach the Trinity and that the New Testament is making a “god” out of Jesus to foster the new religion. Nothing could be further from the truth. Both sections present the triune God.

The Father is named in Malachi 2:10: “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?” Jesus Himself insisted that we pray to the Father. “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9).

The Son is clearly declared in both Testaments. “The LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psalm 2:7). Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), and the apostle Paul insisted that the Lord Jesus was “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

The Holy Spirit is hardly a stranger to both Testaments. King David knew that “the Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2). And as the Lord Jesus was preparing to go back to the Father, He promised that “the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

This much is clear: There is one God, who is manifested to us in three Persons. HMM III

Saturday, May 7

The Soul Exchange

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37)

The lives of many people revolve almost completely around the stock exchange, and they never stop to realize that it easily may become a soul exchange, where they exchange their very souls for the imagined blessings of the great god Mammon. “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Similarly, many are greatly exercised about their monthly profit-and-loss statements. But the Lord Jesus asks whether there is really a profit, even if one acquires the wealth of the whole world at the cost of his soul, and the answer to such a rhetorical question has to be: “No!” For “the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17).

Furthermore, the words “life” in verse 35 and “soul” in our text are actually the same word (*psuche*) in the Greek original. That is, to lose one’s soul is to lose one’s very life, for they are inseparable. A life centered around money is not only a soul lost but a life wasted as well. On the other hand, if we lose our lives in Christ, then we find true life, eternal life, beginning here and now, and continuing forever. This is a good exchange!

God may well bless a Christian with material wealth, but this should not be his motivation. “Charge them that are rich in this world,” Paul says, “that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate [i.e., share]; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19). HMM

Sunday, May 8

Two Mothers

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” (Luke 1:46-47)

Two Jewish ladies, each carrying children recently conceived, met to discuss their circumstances. Perhaps billions of mothers, before and since, have had similar encounters, but since this meeting between Mary and Elizabeth was so special and precious, perhaps we can all profit by its study.

The first thing we notice is that their conversation turned immediately to God, to praise of Him for His goodness and grace. No doubt each one experienced all the common difficulties and discomforts of these months but chose instead to dwell on their blessings and the greatness of God.

Mary especially, in the discourse introduced by our text, burst forth in a torrent of praise, singing of the virtues of her Savior and reveling in His grace (vv. 46-55). He had chosen her despite her unworthiness. Her present misunderstood circumstances were not in view at all, just her precious communion with her Lord and His gracious dealings with mankind. In all these things, she “rejoiced.”

Note that there is no hint of doubt in her song, neither is there a shrinking back from His holiness. In these verses are no fewer than 15 quotations from the Old Testament. Mary knew God’s Word well and sang it back to Him. Furthermore, she sings in humility, not calling herself “mother of God,” as some do today, but sings of “God my Saviour.”

These two mothers provide a model for each of us, especially those blessed with childbearing. May each encounter focus on Him, not just on temporal events. May our fellowship be centered in Him and in His Word, not just with friends or family. May prayer and praise burst forth from our lips, not just idle conversation. May we know all the joy and confidence of Mary and join in her song. JDM

Monday, May 9

Atonement

“Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.”
(Genesis 6:14)

It may be surprising to learn that God’s instructions to Noah concerning the Ark’s design contain the first reference in the Bible to the great doctrine of atonement. The Hebrew word used here for pitch (*kaphar*) is the same word translated “atonement” in many other places in the Old Testament.

While the New Testament word “atonement” implies reconciliation, the Old Testament “atonement” was merely a covering (with many applications). As the pitch was to make the Ark watertight, keeping the judgment waters of the Flood from reaching those inside, so, on the sacrificial altar, “it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11), keeping the fires of God’s wrath away from the sinner for whom the sacrifice was substituted and slain. The pitch was a covering for the Ark, and the blood was a covering for the soul, the first assuring physical deliverance, the second spiritual salvation.

However, not even the shed blood on the altar could really produce salvation. It could assure it through faith in God’s promises on the part of the sinner who offered it, but “the blood of bulls and of goats” could never “take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

Both the covering pitch and animal blood were mere symbols of the substituting death of Jesus Christ, “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25). Through faith in Christ, our sins are “covered” under the blood, forgiven by God, and replaced by His own perfect righteousness, by all of which we become finally and fully reconciled to God. HMM

Tuesday, May 10

Jesus Is the Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”
(John 1:1, 14)

Most of us would be familiar with the Greek term used by God to convey this unique title of the Lord Jesus: *logos*. Its basic meaning is “that which can be communicated.” Sometimes it is used to embrace a collection of ideas expressed in a speech, or a thought in the sense of an idea, or the logic behind a concept.

Jesus is all of that: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). Not only did the Lord Jesus declare what the Father said but what the Father was like. It is obvious that Jesus was the Spokesperson: “Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (John 12:50). “Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Much of the active ministry of the Lord Jesus was doing what God would do. His healing, His preaching, His gracious ministry to the poor and needy were all a picture of what God was like. But the miracles, the works of creation, were absolutely the “declaration” of God. Turning water into wine, feeding the 5,000, creating a new hand and new eyes—only the Creator could do that. In fact, Jesus said, “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake” (John 14:11).

Jesus is the Word of God in every sense that can be spoken, understood, seen, and experienced (Colossians 2:9).
HMM III

Wednesday, May 11

Things Worth Knowing

“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; for we shall see him as he is.”
(1 John 3:2)

Although the book of 1 John is well known for its use of the word “love,” various words, such as “know,” “perceive,” and “behold,” occur almost as often.

Several of these words refer to the work of Christ in salvation. “And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins” (1 John 3:5). “We know that we have passed from death unto life” (1 John 3:14), and “hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). This knowledge brings great comfort and assurance: “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 5:13).

This knowledge should bring us into a life of submission and service: “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:5). Similarly, “he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24; see also 1 John 4:13).

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

The culmination of a life marked by salvation, assurance, empowering, and victory will be that we will be with Him and be like Him. “Behold [same word as ‘know’], what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). JDM

Thursday, May 12

The Indwelling Holy Spirit

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (Romans 8:9)

Note that in this one verse the Holy Spirit is called both “the Spirit of God” and “the Spirit of Christ.” Thus, the two terms are synonymous, which means that Christ is God, and so is the Holy Spirit.

Note also that we “have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). In fact, our text assures each of us that we are actually living “in the Spirit,” because He has come to “dwell in you.” All of this has come about “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, . . . by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). This glorious new birth, with sins forgiven and eternal life, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit in response to our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord.

But also note that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” It is absolutely vital that we have the Holy Spirit, “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14). The question is, just how do we know that we have the Holy Spirit?

The answer is, because His Word says so! “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me,” said Jesus, “hath everlasting life” (John 5:24). Furthermore, we have the testimony of internal peace and assurance. “The Spirit [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16).

Finally, the indwelling Spirit will increasingly be growing His eternal fruit in our lives—the ninefold fruit of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23), and this will testify to others also that we do indeed have the Holy Spirit. HMM

Friday, May 13

Death by Sin

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

This very important verse conveys several vital truths. First of all, death came into the world only when sin came into the world. Suffering and death of conscious life, whether animal or human, were not a part of God’s “finished” and “very good” creation (Genesis 1:31–2:3). There was an abundance of food and all other provisions for both people and animals. There was certainly no “struggle for existence” or “survival of the fittest,” for every creature was created “fit” for its own environment.

When Adam sinned, however, it became necessary for God to bring the curse of decay and death not only upon Adam but also upon all his dominion (Genesis 3:17-20; see also Romans 8:20-22; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Furthermore, there remains no warrant for the notion that “Adam” is simply a generic term representing the human race. He was “one man.” In fact, he was “the first man” (1 Corinthians 15:45), and Eve was “the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). There was certainly no population of evolving hominids becoming “Adam.” In fact, Christ Himself made it clear that Adam and Eve were there “from the beginning of the creation” (Mark 10:6, quoting Genesis 1:27).

The entire argument here in Romans 5:12-21 becomes irrelevant if the Genesis record of the creation and Fall of Adam did not happen precisely as recorded in Genesis 1–3, and this would mean that there is no reality in the saving work of Christ, either.

Such a rejection of the Christian faith is hardly warranted by the fragmentary fossils that have been alleged to support the notion of human evolution. No one should stake his eternal soul on such a will-o’-the-wisp as that! HMM

Saturday, May 14

Present with the Lord

“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8)

This verse has proved of great comfort to many a sorrowing believer who has just lost a loved one. Especially if they know that the parent or child or friend was also a believer in the saving work and person of Christ, then—although they sorrow—they “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

For that loved one, though no longer in that old body which had perhaps been filled with pain, is now with the Lord. That is, he or she has been given a somewhat indescribable spiritual body in which to function in heaven until the coming resurrection day. Although that may not yet be the wonderful life that awaits them in their glorified, resurrection bodies in the ages to come, they will be “with Christ; which is far better” than this present life (Philippians 1:23).

There are a number of sincere believers who argue that dead Christians will simply “sleep” until He comes again to raise the dead. While a certain case can be developed for this “soul sleep” concept, it is hard to see how that could be “far better” than this present life. Paul said that he had a “desire to depart, and to be with Christ” and also that “to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:23, 21). But what “gain” could there be for him in simply “sleeping” instead of continuing to live in Christ?

The Scriptures do not reveal much about that “intermediate state,” as it has been called. But there is that intriguing verse about being “compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” who perhaps are somehow watching us as we “run with patience the race that is set before us” here on Earth (Hebrews 12:1). That possibility can be a real incentive to do just that. HMM

Sunday, May 15

Our Weekly Day of Rest and Worship

“And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.” (Deuteronomy 5:15)

It is significant that God’s Ten Commandments are found twice in the Bible (Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21). In fact, “Deuteronomy” means “the Second Law.” The two are worded identically, with a few exceptions.

The most significant of these changes is in connection with the reason given for obeying the Fourth Commandment, to “keep the sabbath day.” In Exodus, the reason given is: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (Exodus 20:11). Here in “the second law,” the reason given is that God saved Israel out of bondage in Egypt and now was about to enter the Promised Land. In other words, when the Israelites observed each Sabbath day in rest and worship, they were acknowledging God as both their Creator and their Redeemer.

Christians also, as they devote every seventh day as a day of rest and worship, should be remembering God for His finished creation (“the heavens and the earth were finished”—Genesis 2:1) and His finished redemption (“It is finished” was Christ’s victory cry on the cross—John 19:30).

The word “Sabbath” means “rest,” of course—not “Saturday” or “Sunday” or even “seventh” (the word for “seventh” in Hebrew is similar but distinctly different from that for “sabbath”). Most Christians now believe it is appropriate to honor the Lord Jesus (who is both their Creator and Redeemer) to take their seventh day of rest and worship on the first day of each week, thereby recognizing both His finished work of redemption and also His finished work of creation. HMM

Jesus Is Human

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.” (Hebrews 2:17)

There will always be an inability to grasp how the omnipotent and omniscient God could become fully human, yet such is the clear teaching of Scripture. Please notice that “all things” were incorporated into the life of Christ when it “behooved him” to be made like the ones He would call His brethren (our text).

- He experienced pain, hunger, fatigue, etc. (1 Peter 2:23; Matthew 4:2; Luke 8:23; John 19:28).
- He experienced the testing of evil (Luke 4:1-2; Hebrews 4:15; 2:18).
- He was representative of all men in substitutionary death (John 3:14; 12:32).
- He was identified with Adam, the federal head of humanity (1 Corinthians 15:45-47).
- He ascended bodily into heaven (Acts 1:9-11; Ephesians 4:10).
- He still identifies with man (Revelation 1:13-16).

The apostle Paul gave us the simplest summary of what took place among the Trinity as the Lord Jesus “*made* himself of no reputation.” The Greek term used is *ekenosen*. Essentially, it means to make empty, to divest, to make void that which was formerly owned. Jesus, the eternal Second Person of the Godhead, “emptied” Himself and “*took* upon him the form of a servant.” Then, he “was made” in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7).

Please notice the action of the verbs. Jesus did the “making” and the “taking” of the servant likeness that was prepared for Him (Hebrews 10:5). Once emptied and in the body that was made for Him, He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). HMM III

Tuesday, May 17

The Virtue of Having Enemies

“Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26)

It is no compliment to say about a Christian that he has no enemies, for that is the same as saying he has accomplished nothing. The apostle Paul had many bitter enemies, and they finally got him executed. In fact, almost all of the great heroes of the faith, through all the centuries since Satan gained his victory over Adam and Eve, have had to overcome bitter opposition from that wicked one.

So instead of resenting our enemies, we should thank God for them, for they enable us to become more like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Only through such experiences can we learn what it means to say, with Paul: “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). Only if we have enemies can we learn to obey Christ’s difficult command to “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

The Lord Jesus easily could have called on 12 legions of angels to rout His enemies (Matthew 26:53). Instead, He submitted to their vicious insults and cruel tortures, even praying in His agony on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The enemies of Christ killed Him, but had they not done so, He would not have died for our sins, and we would be lost eternally. This is a mystery to ponder, and difficult to comprehend, yet, as the Bible promises, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee” (Psalm 76:10).

The enmity of men can thus be a channel of divine grace to the believer, for “tribulation worketh patience” (Romans 5:3), and “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). HMM

Wednesday, May 18

The Message of the Old Testament

“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” (Isaiah 45:22)

Ever since sin entered into God’s created world, His message to all people of all ages has been the same. At the time of the curse, God prophesied that there soon would be a coming Redeemer—the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, although the Redeemer Himself would be made to suffer in order to do away with the effects of sin (Genesis 3:15). “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11).

God repeatedly warned the people of His hatred of sin and wickedness (see, for example, Psalm 5:4-6; Proverbs 6:16-19), but He recognized that humankind was totally incapable of measuring up to His standard of perfection. That great statement of righteous requirements, the Ten Commandments, demonstrated the utter impossibility of complete compliance (Exodus 20; Psalm 14; etc.). Conversely, God repeatedly extended His invitation to be rescued from sin and its effects and its necessary judgment by confidence in His plan for mankind. In our text, we see that “all the ends of the earth” have the opportunity to be “saved.” “Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come” (Isaiah 45:24).

This plan of God focuses on the promised Redeemer who would come to buy back humanity from its enslavement to sin. “A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: . . . and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6). JDM

Thursday, May 19

Sowing and Sleeping

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.” (1 Corinthians 15:42)

When a believer’s soul and spirit leave the body and return to the Lord, it is significant that the New Testament Scriptures speak of the body not as dead but as sleeping. For example, Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11). This state is not “soul sleep” as some teach, for “to be absent from the body, [is] to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). The body is sleeping—not the soul.

Similarly, when the believer’s body is laid in a grave, Paul speaks of this act not as a burial but as sowing! “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body” (1 Corinthians 15:35-38).

Just as a buried grain of wheat brings forth a fruitful plant, so the old, sin-corrupted, aching body of human flesh, sown in the ground, will some day come forth “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21), in which “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4).

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). When a believer’s body is sown in the ground, God will soon reap from it a body of glory which will last for eternity. HMM

Jesus Is God

“Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him . . . he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:8-9)

Theologians have wrestled with the dual nature of the Lord Jesus since the beginning. On the one hand, there are those who deny or belittle His humanity, and on the other hand, there are those who deny His deity. Both natures are completely true: Jesus is fully human and fully God.

The prophets identified the coming Messiah as fully God. Isaiah 9:6 is the “naming” prophecy that specifies that the Messiah would be called “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 7:14 specifies that “the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Matthew quotes that passage and translates the Hebrew word *Immanuel* as “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

The Scriptures abound with this teaching.

- He is called the only begotten (John 1:14, 18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9).
- He is called the Son of God (John 3:18; 5:25; 9:35; 11:4).
- He is recognized as eternal (John 17:5, 24; Colossians 1:15; Micah 5:2).
- He has the power of life in Himself (Romans 1:4; John 10:17-18; Colossians 1:18; Acts 13:32-33).
- He is given the inheritance of God (Hebrews 1:2; 3:4, 6).
- He performed the works of God (John 10:36-38).
- Even the demons and Satan recognize Christ as God (Luke 4:41; Matthew 4:3, 6).

Saturday, May 21

The Spiritual Rock

“And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:4)

One of the most amazing miracles recorded in the Bible occurred when Moses smote the rock on Mount Horeb and water came forth sufficient to satisfy all the multitude there in the wilderness (Exodus 17:6). In describing this great event, the psalmist later sang: “He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers” (Psalm 78:15-16).

In our text above, Paul indicates that the miracle had great symbolic significance as well. “That Rock was Christ.” The Greek word used here for “rock” is *petra*, the same word used by Christ when He said that “upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Christ is the one foundation upon which the church is built (1 Corinthians 3:11). He is also symbolized by the “living water,” the “well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:10, 14).

The actual rock from which the waters burst forth in the wilderness did not literally “follow them,” of course, but “that spiritual Rock” did follow them, for Christ was there with them through all their years of wandering.

The literal water followed them too, keeping them alive for 40 years. When Moses struck the rock, God opened a mighty spring “out of the great depths” (Psalm 78:15), evidently tapping a deep pressurized aquifer from which waters emerged to form “streams also out of the rock” (v. 16). These streams flowed continually in the desert for 40 years, so the children of Israel could march and camp beside them as long as they were in the wilderness. Christ still today is our spiritual Rock, continually yielding the spiritual waters of everlasting life. HMM

Sunday, May 22

Fear of Fire

“And others save with fear; pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” (Jude 1:23)

This exhortation refers both to attempting to “save” unbelievers by warning them of hell and to warning believers against the influence of apostates.

The ultimate hell (Greek *gehenna*) is not the same as the present hell (Greek *hades*), although eventually all those lost souls now in the latter will eventually be “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). Both are fearsome places of real fire. The inhabitants of Sodom, for example, have been “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7) for thousands of years, though not yet in that ultimate hell. Also, the rich man mentioned by Jesus was in Hades and yet was being “tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:23-24).

Both “hells” have literal fires, but it is hard to understand how material fires could torment non-material souls. There is a clue in James 3:6, which calls an unbridled human tongue “a fire, a world of iniquity: . . . set on fire of hell.” Since the tongue is not literally on fire but can be extremely destructive in human relationships, the implication is that hell itself is a “world of iniquity.”

This aspect of hell makes it even more fearsome than literal fires could ever be. The existence there of billions of unredeemed souls, eternally separated from the holiness and love of God, where all who are “unjust” and “filthy” will continue forever to increase in their unrighteous and filthiness (Revelation 22:11) and in the constant presence also of the devil and his angels, is unspeakably appalling. Yet that was their choice when they rejected or ignored the infinite love of Christ.

No wonder that Jude urges us to warn them of such awful fire and seek to save them with fear if they won't respond to the compassionate love of Christ. HMM

Monday, May 23

How Can Things Invisible Be Seen?

“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; so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20)

This powerful verse introduces Paul’s burning description of the descent of ancient human societies that once “knew God” (Romans 1:21) into evolutionary paganism, idolatry, and wickedness. This deterioration was willful and inexcusable, for they had abundant evidence of God’s nature and power in the very creation which they had chosen to worship instead of the Creator (Romans 1:25).

Even though God Himself was invisible (being omnipresent), they could easily see the evidence of His existence and His grace in creating and sustaining all things, “for God hath shewed it unto them” (Romans 1:19). “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).

Since these things were “clearly seen” and “understood” by men “from the creation of the world” (that is, from the time the world was created), it is obvious that there have been men and women there to see and understand these things ever since the world was created. This assures us that the creation did not take place billions of years before men appeared on Earth, as theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists would like to believe. Men and women have been on Earth ever since its very beginning (see also Mark 10:6; Acts 3:21), and all should have recognized and worshiped the true Creator God.

That being true, how much more inexcusable are our modern evolutionists—whether atheistic, pantheistic, or polytheistic—who not only reject the testimony of God in creation but also His far more complete testimony in Scripture and in the person and work of Jesus Christ. HMM

The God Who Saves

“The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” (Psalm 18:2)

What a testimony given by David to his God! In this single verse, there is a sevenfold ascription of praise to the Lord for His great salvation. Each testimony can be appropriated also by all who trust Him.

1. *My Rock*: The word used here does not mean a stone or even a boulder but a mighty monolith, immovable and impregnable.
2. *My Fortress*: This word refers to a great bulwark—a stronghold. The Hebrew word is essentially the same as Masada, the high butte where the Jews resisted the Roman armies after the destruction of Jerusalem.
3. *My Deliverer*: “Our God is able to deliver,” even from the fiery furnace, the den of lions, and from the armies of Saul.
4. *My Strength*: This is another word often translated “rock,” this time a rugged, craggy one, most appropriate as a symbol of great strength.
5. *My Buckler*: The small, movable shield used to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Ephesians 6:16).
6. *The Horn of Salvation*: This striking Old Testament symbol is even repeated in the New Testament (Luke 1:69) and applied to the coming Savior, referring either to the “horns of the altar” where fleeing sinners could cling for refuge or to the fighting horns of a strong beast.
7. *My High Tower*: Here the word is not for a man-made tower but for a natural, high, topographic eminence, suitable both for watching and for defense.

The great promises of salvation and security in Christ are timeless. The words that brought such hope to David are still a comfort to believers today. He is still “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10) to all who trust Him. HMM

Wednesday, May 25

Instruction Contrary to Knowledge

“Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.” (Proverbs 19:27)

One of the saddest realities in the modern world is that many of the leaders of evolutionary and humanistic thought were raised in Christian homes, where from an early age they were exposed to the truths of Scripture. Testimonies without number have been chronicled of Christian students going to universities where they were taught to doubt and then to disbelieve the faith of their parents. Perhaps all these students ever knew of Christianity was a set of rules; maybe they never understood the reasons their parents held certain views or the basis for these beliefs. Certainly the foundational teaching of creation has been missing in many Christian homes and churches.

Our primary goal as parents should be to establish a godly heritage—to teach the truths of God in such a way as will be believed and cherished by our children, so that they will “keep that which is committed to [their] trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called” (1 Timothy 6:20).

Certainly a more effective way of teaching is to continually point the child or student back to foundational principles rather than to list a set of dos and don'ts. We must teach those under our influence to be grounded in the Word so that they can make sound judgments when away from our watchful eyes. No greater aid to serious study, no better primer in careful reasoning exists than in Scripture. Using it and other supportive materials, a child can learn to think carefully and critically. Not only will they learn information, but here they can learn wisdom and knowledge and understanding. “For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6). JDM

Thursday, May 26

Jesus Is the Savior

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Timothy 1:10)

For centuries, the message of the gospel was presented in drama through the sacrificial system instituted through Moses. Obviously, Moses did not invent the concept of an innocent blood sacrifice. God Himself performed the initial “atone-ment” when He made coverings for Adam and Eve with the skins of animals that the Creator Himself killed and prepared for them (Genesis 3:21).

Abel brought the “more excellent sacrifice,” but Cain tried “another gospel” and was rejected (Genesis 4:3-5). After the Flood, “Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Genesis 8:20). Abraham and Jacob offered animal sacrifices to the Lord in recognition of their subservience to Him and in obedience to the instructions they were given (Genesis 12:7; 46:1).

When Moses received the Law from the hand of God on Mount Sinai, the entire system of sacrifices was centered around a male “lamb without blemish” (Leviticus 1:10; 23:12). This was the Passover Lamb that became the symbol of God’s deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 12:21) and was directly applied to the Lord Jesus as “our passover” who was “sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Of all the names given to the Lord Jesus, it is the Lamb title that stands out so strongly when referencing the sacrifice He made. John the Baptist called out, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and it is the “Lamb that was slain” who is worthy to “receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12). HMM III

Friday, May 27

Never Too Late

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”
(Luke 23:42-43)

One of the two thieves on the cross continued in unbelief right up until the time he died (Luke 23:39), but the second repented and believed unto salvation. The one assures us that no one need despair, since it is always possible to accept Christ at any time before death. The other warns us, on the other hand, that no one should presume. Long-continued rebellion against God is likely to become so fixed in one's character that sincere repentance may become impossible.

The repentant thief, beholding Christ and hearing the first of the seven so-called “words from the cross” (Luke 23:34), came to believe that Jesus truly was Lord and that He could, indeed, grant forgiveness and salvation.

The penitent thief had no opportunity to be baptized, to change his lifestyle, or to do anything whatever except repent, believe on Christ, and confess his faith (Romans 10:9-10). And that was sufficient!

Both thieves would die that day, and the soul of the unrepentant thief would soon descend into Hades, there to await condemnation at the future judgment day. The other, because of his trust in Christ, would go with Him to paradise.

The tragedy is that far too many people, assuring themselves that it is never too late, keep waiting until it becomes forever too late! “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Proverbs 27:1). The overwhelming majority of people who come to trust in Christ for salvation do so when they are young. Very few come to the Lord when they are old or about to die. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). HMM

Saturday, May 28

A Little Flock

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

The world tends to measure success by size, and this seems generally true in the Christian world as well. The most “successful” churches are considered to be those with the largest congregations, or the largest budgets, or the greatest number of converts baptized each year, or some other quantitative index. But this is not God’s criterion. At the judgment seat of Christ, “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13). Not how big it is, but of what sort it is! Quality, not quantity, is the criterion.

Christ’s encouraging words to the “little flock” were given toward the end of an extended warning against the desire to accumulate wealth. “Take heed, and beware of covetousness,” He had said (Luke 12:15), speaking to His small group of followers. He was their Shepherd and would provide the needs of His “little flock.”

Christ’s warnings against individual covetousness evidently apply also to group covetousness. A church, or any other Christian organization, needs continually to guard against the desire to be impressive in the eyes of the world. The cities of Christendom exhibit many ornate cathedrals and temples that are now mostly empty and spiritually dead.

The Lord Jesus promised an “open door” to the little church at Philadelphia, because it had “little strength” and had “kept [His] word” (Revelation 3:8), but threatened to “spue . . . out of [His] mouth” the tepid church at Laodicea, which was boasting that she was “rich, and increased with goods” (Revelation 3:16-17). Not every “little flock” has kept God’s Word, nor has every big flock become lukewarm, but Christ’s words serve as both warning and encouragement. The greater blessings of the coming kingdom have been promised to the faithful “little flock.” HMM

Sunday, May 29

Worship of Idols and Demons

“They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.” (Deuteronomy 32:17)

This terrible indictment was in the farewell song of Moses, written just before the tribes of Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land. Perhaps Moses was thinking mainly of the golden calf fashioned by Aaron, who had told the people: “These be thy gods, O Israel” (Exodus 32:4).

Aaron and the people certainly knew that the man-made calf was not “gods,” but they knew that there were many invisible spirit beings in the world and that these “devils” (actually fallen angels) could indwell images made by men as objects of worship. These evil spirits do possess certain powers, which can be used to impress their worshippers with the magical insights and abilities of the images.

This was also a problem in the early church. Paul warned his converts at Corinth: “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils” (1 Corinthians 10:20). John’s closing word to his own flock was: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

It is a serious problem today—not only in lands where images and animalistic spirits abound but even in the “Christian” West, both in the proliferating New Age cults and in “mainline” churches that have diluted sound Bible teaching with humanism and ritualistic pantheism. And remember, too, that “covetousness” (that is, coveting money, or power, or anything more than the will of God) “is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). When the prince of these devils himself sought the worship of Jesus, the Lord answered: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10). We need to remember and follow His example. HMM

Monday, May 30

The Eternal Flame

“The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.” (Leviticus 6:13)

The so-called “eternal flame” at the tomb of former President John Kennedy will surely eventually be extinguished. The same proved to be true for the continual burnt offering ordained by God in Israel’s ancient tabernacle sacrifices. The continual sacrifices for sin were of no more avail once God’s own sacrifice had been slain. “Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; . . . For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:11-12, 14).

There is one flame, however, which is truly eternal. Jesus spoke of it several times. For example: “It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:43). “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Then, in the last book of the Bible describing the final judgment, “the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. . . . And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10, 15).

But there is also another symbolic significance to the continual burnt offering: “Did not our heart burn within us, . . . while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). “His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones” (Jeremiah 20:9). “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Hebrews 13:15). Set on fire by the Word of God and the love of Christ, our hearts should burn with His praises continually. HMM

Tuesday, May 31

Man Must Repent

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.” (Romans 3:10-11)

From the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator in the Garden, humanity has attempted to deflect conscious acceptance of guilt. Adam blamed God because “the woman” was given to him by the Creator. Eve blamed the serpent—and you and I have continued that reaction ever since.

That is precisely why repentance is a requirement for salvation. When Adam rebelled, the relationship between man and God was destroyed: “By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” and “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Romans 5:18-19). All men have “no hope, and [are] without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

The death that entered the world because of Adam (Romans 5:12) not only introduced physical death into the entire creation (Romans 8:22) but a spiritual separation from the life of God, as well, that eliminated the possibility of our comprehending God’s nature. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). For millennia God bore man’s ignorance of what God was going to do through Christ Jesus at Calvary by faith in the promise of the coming “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Each of us must change our mind and admit we are sinful and desperately need God’s gracious forgiveness, praying, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). HMM III



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