

Days of Praise

March ♦ April ♦ May 2024

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

March • April • May 2024

*“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is
fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are
pleasures for evermore.”
(Psalm 16:11)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

Dear Christian friend,

The Father has highly exalted His beloved Son. It's clear that the name of Jesus is far above everything in every realm. The verses above set a wonderful theme for this spring quarter's devotions.

Certainly the Lord Jesus is the friend of sinners. He's the one who loves us and gave Himself for us. But reminders that Jesus Christ is high and holy, constantly revered by the angelic host, and majestic in every way are deeply important for us as well.

Thank you for setting aside time each day to meet with us in devotional thoughts about our perfect Savior. I pray that the Holy Spirit will use these short Bible studies to help you fall deeper in love with the Lord Jesus and our good heavenly Father.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

Contributors:

HMM

HMM III

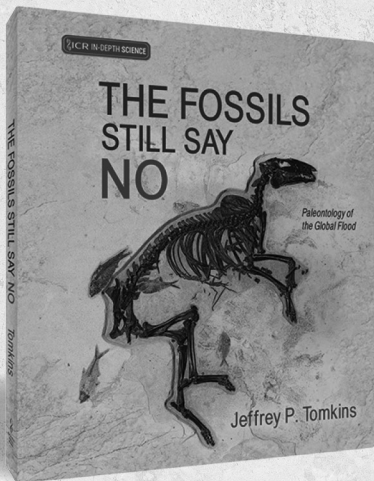
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Friday, March 1

The Good Pleasure of God

“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.”
(2 Thessalonians 1:11)

God’s good pleasure withholds judgment! “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23). “The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Psalm 145:8-9).

God’s good pleasure is to do good to His people! “The LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11). “Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psalm 37:3-4).

God’s good pleasure forgives us! “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18-19).

God’s good pleasure is to bring about His will! “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts....So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:9-11). “The Lord...is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). When we live in God’s good pleasure, we are able to “delight” in Him. HMM III

Saturday, March 2

Diluting the Word of God

“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:19)

It is a very serious error to try to add some new revelation to God’s written Word, as many cults and false religions do. This is the warning of verse 18 (see also Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6).

It is even more dangerous, as shown in the above text (the third from the last verse of the Bible), to delete (or even dilute) any of the words of the Bible. Note that the warning emphasizes the *words*, not just the thoughts. The sad fact is that a great many liberal theologians, especially in the past hundred years or so, have been doing just that, thinking thereby to make Christianity more compatible with modern science and philosophy. But they are literally playing with fire—this same book had just warned that any whose names do not remain in the book of life will be “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). Tragically, many of the sections they seek to “take away” are the references to hell.

God has promised to guard His Word against any such deletions. “The words of the LORD are pure words:...Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever” (Psalm 12:6-7).

There are also many who would not try to take away any of the words from the text but who then dilute their intended meaning in order to attract unbelieving intellectuals. This also is dangerous. Peter warns against those who would “wrest, ...scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16). We must never forget the words of the Bible are “pure words,” meaning just what they say. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God [God-breathed], and is profitable...” (2 Timothy 3:16). HMM

Sunday, March 3

Blinded Minds

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

The “god of this world” is none other than Satan, who is also called “the prince of this world” (John 12:31) and the one “which deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). It is sobering to realize that he and his demonic cohorts have the power to blind the minds of unbelievers, preventing them from comprehending even the simplest elements of the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, Christ can make the blind to see! In answer to prayer and through the faithful presentation of the Word of truth, “the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know...” (Ephesians 1:17-18).

The Lord desires that people come to Christ; therefore, He gives His witnesses weapons that can even vanquish Satan and open the eyes of the spiritually blind. These are the spiritual weapons of truth and righteousness, peace and faith, the Word and prayer (Ephesians 6:11-18). “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations [literally, ‘reasonings’], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought [same word as ‘mind’] to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Even though Satan is far more intelligent and powerful than we or those we seek to reach, God still enables us to recapture their minds and bring them to Christ as we proclaim His truth, in His name, by His grace! HMM

Monday, March 4

The Perfections of God

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

Since God is Creator of the universe, all that He does is right, and all He says is truth, by definition. The world He created was perfect; the Word He inscripturated is perfect; every work He accomplishes is perfect; all the ways He follows are perfect; and the will He reveals is perfect.

His perfect world: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Of course, because of sin, the creation is now groaning in pain, but it was perfect as it came from God in the beginning. It will again be perfect in the ages to come, when God makes “all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

His perfect Word: “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7). God has given us His inspired Word, providing perfect guidance for every need, “that the man of God may be perfect” (2 Timothy 3:17).

His perfect works: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4). Not only His work in creation but also His works of redemption and reconciliation—all His works throughout history.

His perfect ways: “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him” (Psalm 18:30). His ways may not be our ways (Isaiah 55:9), but always, they are the best ways.

His perfect will: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that...perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2). His will is invariably right.

Thus, God is our standard of perfection, and we must never set a lower standard for ourselves. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (our text). HMM

Tuesday, March 5

Peter and the Name of Jesus

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

This is the climactic declaration ending Peter’s three great messages in the early chapters of Acts (2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12). On the previous day, he and John had seen the crippled man healed at the temple gate, saying: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). Testifying to the crowd that had assembled following the miracle, Peter said: “His name through faith in his name hath made this man strong” (Acts 3:16).

But what exactly is meant by “His name”? In biblical usage, one’s name stands for his character and all that he is and does. In his three messages, Peter actually used many different names and titles to refer to Christ. Note the following partial list: the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, Thine Holy One, Christ, Jesus Christ, a Prophet, the Stone, the Head of the Corner.

To the multitude on the day of Pentecost, he had exhorted: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). To the Sanhedrin, he said: “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).

Perhaps the most definitive form of “the name” was prescribed by Peter in the concluding statement of his great sermon on the day of Pentecost: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Thus, He is the Lord Jesus Christ. HMM

Wednesday, March 6

Living Stones in the Holy Temple

“And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house....And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.” (1 Kings 5:17; 6:7)

The building of Solomon’s temple was one of the most remarkable construction operations in history. Much of the temple’s legendary beauty was attributed to the great stones—beautiful and costly stones quarried from beds of white limestone—that were used in its construction.

Probably the most remarkable feature of its building was the fact that each stone was carefully cut and dimensioned while still in the quarry, so that the temple itself could be erected in silence, with each stone fitting perfectly in place as it came to the temple site. The temple, as the structure where God would meet with His people, was considered too sacred to permit the noise of construction during its erection.

In the New Testament, the physical temple is taken as a type of the mighty house of God being erected by the Holy Spirit. “[Ye] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Each believer is like one of the beautiful temple stones, so costly that the price was the shed blood of Christ Himself. Taken out of the great pit of sin by the Holy Spirit, each person, one by one, is being placed quietly in the great spiritual temple. “Ye also, as lively [i.e., living] stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). HMM

Thursday, March 7

The Christian Rest

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” (Hebrews 4:9-10)

This is an important New Testament affirmation that God’s work of creation was “finished from the foundation of the world” (Hebrews 4:3). The reference is to Genesis 2:1-3, where the writer has told us that God had “rested from all his work which God created and made,” thus completely denying the contention of theistic evolutionists that the processes of “creation” (that is, evolution) are still going on.

In addition, it makes a significant comparison between the believer’s rest and God’s rest. The word “rest” here is not the usual word for “rest” and is used only this once in the New Testament. It means, literally, “sabbath rest” or “keeping of the Sabbath.” In the context of chapters 2 and 3 of Hebrews, the concept of rest is being expounded with several meanings. The original warning was in Psalm 95:11, where it referred both to the Israelites entering into the promised land under Joshua and to God’s own rest after His work of creation. Psalm 95 is repeatedly quoted in Hebrews, where other meanings are also implied: the keeping of a weekly Sabbath in commemoration of God’s rest after creation; the promised future rest to the world and its believing inhabitants—possibly in the millennium but certainly in the new earth; and the believer’s present spiritual rest after he puts his faith in Christ, no longer trusting in his works for salvation.

With such a rich investiture of meaning in the fact of God’s past rest and the promise of our *future* rest, it is appropriate that there should be a perpetual weekly commemoration and expression of faith in that rest in every generation until its ultimate fulfillment in the eternal rest in the New Jerusalem.

In the meantime, we are urged to “labour” to “enter into that rest” (Hebrews 4:11). HMM

Blessed in Christ

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)

This little phrase, “in Christ,” conveys a world of doctrinal truth with great blessing to the believer. Positionally speaking, God has actually “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). God in effect sees us as “in Christ,” and this wonderful position at God’s right hand implies great honor.

It is well to note similar phrases throughout Scripture. Paul assures us that we were “chosen...in him before the foundation of the world” (1:4), “accepted in the beloved” (1:6), and “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (2:10).

He is the one “in whom also we have obtained an inheritance” (1:11) and “in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (2:22). We have the glorious future promise that God will “gather together in one all things in Christ” (1:10) “according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (1:19-20).

Therefore, in our exalted position in Him, in the heavenly places, we do indeed enjoy “all spiritual blessings.” This doctrinal truth provides us with the incentive and power to live a practical Christian life that is genuinely consistent with our high calling and position in Him.

This is the basis of the many New Testament exhortations to the believer to live daily “in Christ.” For example, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6). Therefore, since “ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God....For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). HMM

Saturday, March 9

True Discipleship

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
(John 8:31-32)

One may come to a mental acceptance of certain facts about God and deceive himself into thinking he believes on Christ, but the genuineness of that faith needs to be tested before it is judged as real. “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:19-20). Works, of course, do not save one’s soul, but the faith that does save is a faith that produces good works.

An earlier group of listeners had also “believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them [literally, ‘did not believe on them’], because he knew all men” (John 2:23-24). It is essential that we believe on Him but even more essential that He believe on us!

The test is simple! If we *continue* in His Word, then we are real disciples. Our dedication to Christ is measured by our obedience to His Word. If we question His Word, or resent His Word, or try to avoid obeying His Word by “interpreting” some preferred meaning of our own into His Word, then we urgently need to examine the genuineness of our belief in Christ.

If we *are* His disciples and do continue in His Word, then He makes us a wonderful promise: “Ye shall know the truth.” Literally, this is “*come to know* the truth.” As true disciples (that is, “learners”), we have His assurance that our continuing studies in His Word will yield an ever-increasing comprehension of God’s created and revealed “truth” with ever-growing freedom to understand and obey the perfect will of God. HMM

Sunday, March 10

Good, Very Good, and Not Good

“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

Six times during the creation week, God saw His handiwork and pronounced it “good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Finally, when it was all finished, He surveyed all He had just completed and judged it all to be *very good*!

That is the way with God. And if He can make a flawless universe, we can be confident He knows what He is doing with us. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). What God does must be, by definition, *good*! We can affirm, therefore, with confidence (even though it must often be by faith rather than sight) that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

There is, of course, an important scientific principle also established by this verse: whenever we see anything in the world that is *not* good (e.g., sin, suffering, death), we can know that such things constitute an intrusion into God’s perfect creation. They were not “created” as a part of the primeval creation, nor will God allow them to continue their intrusion forever. They all eventually must be eliminated when God makes His new earth. In the meantime, this principle tells us that the great sedimentary rocks of the earth’s crust, containing as they do the fossilized remains of billions of dead animals, plants, and people, must have all been formed sometime after the end of creation week. At least most of them must therefore have been formed at the time of the great Flood (Genesis 6–9) when “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6).

Because of sin, the *present* world is groaning in pain (Romans 8:22), but the *first world* was all “very good.” HMM

Monday, March 11

Setting Up an Ebenezer

“Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.” (1 Samuel 7:12)

Many Christians have joined in the singing of a familiar verse in an old hymn without knowing its great meaning: “Here I raise mine Ebenezer; hither by thy help I’ve come.” When the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines, the old priest, Eli, and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, all died the same day, as did Phinehas’ wife in childbirth. It was a tragic day for Israel.

But then the people returned to God under Samuel, and 20 years later the Lord gave them a miraculous victory over the superior armies of the Philistines. In commemoration of this deliverance, Samuel set up a stone monument in the same place where the Philistines had captured the Ark 20 years before, calling the stone “Ebenezer,” a name that was always associated thereafter with the site (1 Samuel 4:1; 5:1).

Now “Ebenezer” means “Stone of Help,” and seeing it would always remind the people, whenever they might later come to fear the circumstances around them, that God had been their “help in ages past” and thus could be trusted as their “hope for years to come.” Only God is *truly* able to help in times of great need, but He *is* able! “From whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1-2).

It is well to remember those times in our own lives when God has helped us in some special way. We forget so easily, and the sin of ingratitude is cited by God as one of the first harbingers of imminent apostasy (note especially Romans 1:21). A physical token can help us remember, but whatever it takes—*remember!* God will hear and answer our prayers for future help, too, but “with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6). HMM

Tuesday, March 12

Glorified in the Saints

“And they glorified God in me.” (Galatians 1:24)

It is amazing to read in the Scriptures that the God of glory can actually receive yet more glory through His people. But that is what happened in Paul. When he became a Christian, his life changed completely, and those who saw the change glorified God in Paul.

Jesus prayed that this would be so, not only in Paul but in all His followers. In the upper room before His crucifixion, He prayed: “I pray for them...which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them” (John 17:9-10).

He is glorified when we, like Paul, become His. But then He is further glorified as we grow in Him. Paul himself prayed for those whom he had seen come to Christ: “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him” (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

Finally, He shall be glorified when He comes again. “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven...he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

As we give glory to Christ in word and deed, He truly was, and is, and will be glorified in His saints. This is a privilege greater than can be measured that more than compensates for any opposition this generates from the world. “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (1 Peter 4:14). Therefore, “let your light so shine before men, that they may...glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). HMM

Wednesday, March 13

The Everlasting Gospel

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” (Revelation 14:6-7)

When the Lord Jesus returned to heaven after His resurrection, He left the disciples with the Great Commission to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Unfortunately, over the centuries there has developed much misunderstanding concerning the content of the gospel (“good tidings”), and many have preached “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6) that can never save. This false gospel wears many faces, but inevitably, at its heart will be found the false hope of evolutionary humanism, glorifying man instead of God, worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator (Romans 1:25).

We can be sure that the gospel preached in our text is the true gospel—in fact, it is called specifically the everlasting gospel! And its great burden is to call people everywhere back to faith in the one true Creator God, who made all things in heaven and Earth. The Lord Jesus Christ must be accepted, first of all, as God and Creator before it can be meaningful to present Him as Savior and Lord. Otherwise, we preach “another gospel” and “another Jesus”—neither of which are even real!

The true gospel must also present Christ as the sin-bearing, crucified, resurrected Savior (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) and as the coming King of kings and Lord of lords (Matthew 4:23; Revelation 19:16). But it must first present Him as omnipotent and offended Creator. Then only, like the angel, do we truly proclaim the everlasting gospel. HMM

Thursday, March 14

The Essence of Sin

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1)

The first entrance of sin into the world was Satan’s subtle suggestion to Eve that God’s word might not be true and authoritative after all. Then came Satan’s blatant “Ye shall not surely die” (v. 4), openly charging the Creator with falsehood. Ever since that time, the basic root of every sin has been unbelief—the implicit denial of the Creator’s Word.

Therefore, God’s judgment on human sin will be in relation to His Word. Jesus said: “There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me” (John 5:45-46). He also said: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). In principle, the Lord Jesus tells us that both the Old Testament (“the law of Moses”) and New Testament (“the law of Christ”) will be witnesses against us at God’s judgment throne.

In fact, at the final judgment, the “books” are specifically said to be the basis of God’s condemnation of the unsaved: “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). These books surely include the books of the Bible, wherein are written the laws of God, against which men and women are to be judged. Since even one transgression makes one guilty (James 2:10), none could ever stand at the judgment by his own works. But since unbelief is the essence of sin, faith in God’s Word and in the person and work of the Savior revealed in God’s Word brings forgiveness, salvation, and righteousness. HMM

Friday, March 15

The Provision of God

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)

Psalms 136 gives three key examples of God’s sovereign provision. He protects and shelters during our times in the “wilderness.” He makes possible victories over great “enemies.” And He gives “food to all flesh.” God’s detailed provision and the many examples thereof in the Scriptures are inexhaustible. Yet, in these three areas, we may find hope for any situation “in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Our “wanderings” are compared to hard-hearted Israel (1 Corinthians 10) and the many physical and spiritual sins of a people in rebellion against God’s control in their lives. Jesus warned that the “cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things” would “choke the word” and make us unfruitful (Mark 4:19). Yet, even though we may be like the younger son in the story of the prodigal (Luke 15:11-32) and would waste our “substance in riotous living,” God was still the Provider of the inheritance that was wasted. God was still waiting for the son to “come to himself” and return home. God still has compassion, and He forgives and restores to fellowship all who come home.

And were it not for the promises of deliverance from our enemies that are so replete throughout the Scriptures, were it not for the hope that we would see deliverance “in the land of the living” (Psalm 27:13), and were it not for the confident knowledge that “evildoers shall be cut off” (Psalm 37:9), we would be in constant fear and torment. God promises to bring us victory! We are told that He will fight for us, and that we are not left to our own devices! Jesus said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth....and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20). HMM III

Praying for Faith

“Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” (1 Thesalonians 5:24)

Many centuries ago, a desperate father brought his son to the Lord Jesus with an appeal for healing. The boy was demon-possessed from childhood and tormented physically and spiritually. The agony was awful. His father had brought him to Jesus’ disciples, and they were unable to do anything. Nothing worked (Mark 9:17-21).

Jesus told the father, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (v. 23). The urgent and tearful cry of that hurting father was, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (v. 24). No doubt we often need to plea for such help. Join me in this prayer that the Lord will grant us greater faith in Him.

Oh Lord, God, we cannot know the end of a thing. We do not have certainty about the plans of our days. Forgive us when we try without consulting You. Forgive our blundering efforts to make something happen. We love You, and we want to please You, but our lives are so caught up in the things of this world. Help us, Lord. Help us to know how much we need You. Help us to see the real values of eternal things. Give us a greater awareness of Your Holy Spirit. Give us a holy awe of Your Word. Drive us to our knees more often, Lord. Keep us close.

Oh, our Father, purge us from the ungodly. Separate us from the sins that hinder and blind us. Meet us in the halls of our heart and sanctify us there. And then, Lord Jesus, embolden us for the work ahead. Provide our daily bread. Cleanse us of our sins and enrich our fellowship with the saints. Clothe us in the armor of God and place us where we must stand. Enable us to resist the enemy in the faith, that we may see his strongholds crumble and his minions flee. Grant us a fruitful harvest and an effective ministry, in Jesus’ name. Amen. HMM III

Sunday, March 17

The Saints

“Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household.” (Philippians 4:21-22)

The apostle Paul typically began and ended most of his church epistles with greetings to and from “the saints.” The context in each case shows that this term was applied to all those who were “in Christ Jesus”—that is, all true Christians. The Greek word *hagios* meant essentially those people or things that are set aside or consecrated to the Lord. It is frequently translated “holy” and can be applied to objects dedicated to the Lord, as in Hebrews 9:24 (“holy places made with hands”).

The term is applied also to Old Testament believers. At the time of Christ’s resurrection, we are told that “many bodies of the saints which slept arose” (Matthew 27:52).

Although “saints” should be altogether godly and righteous as well as set aside to the Lord, that is not necessarily always how they act. Thus, special men have been called by God (e.g., pastors, teachers, etc.) “for the perfecting of the saints” (Ephesians 4:12).

Some of these latter have been given the supposedly exclusive right to be called saints by the Catholic church. Other than “St. Mary” and “St. Peter,” the best known of these may be “St. Patrick,” the so-called “patron saint” of Ireland. Patrick was certainly a very zealous missionary, largely responsible for the conversion of the Irish from paganism back in the early fifth century, and all we know about him would confirm that he was indeed a “saint” in the true biblical sense.

Since the sole biblical criterion to be classed as “His saints” is “them that believe,” that includes us! That being the case, should we not be zealous to see that our lives are such as “becometh saints” (Ephesians 5:3)? HMM

Monday, March 18

Brethren, We Have Met to Worship

“We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” (Colossians 1:9)

The first verse of a moving hymn titled “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship” reads:

*Brethren, we have met to worship
And adore the Lord our God;
Will you pray with all your power,
While we try to preach the Word?
All is vain unless the Spirit
Of the Holy One comes down;
Brethren, pray, and holy manna
Will be showered all around.*

In many of yesterday’s churches, certain leaders would gather while the pastor was preaching to pray for power and clarity in his words, for responsive listeners, and for souls changed for eternity. Even a spiritually mature preacher can accomplish nothing of lasting worth without empowerment of the Holy Spirit: “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

As God’s Word is preached in purity and with spiritual power, we can expect His blessings. The hymn writer used manna, the miraculous provision of food for the Israelites in the wilderness, to symbolize God’s answer to the church’s prayers. How we long for such manna, this all-sustaining provision for every need, this solution to every problem in the ministry, and the fruit that is borne of our labors. How our churches need to return to dependence on intercessory prayer, not on people and programs, for lasting fruit.

God is still in the prayer-answering business. Dare we ask God for manna such as this? JDM

Tuesday, March 19

Pray for the Lost

“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8)

Intercessory prayer in church must not be for other believers only, but also for unbelievers. Many attendees mistakenly consider themselves true Christians, and others are merely curious. Both are doomed for a Christless and hopeless eternity. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). There is still an opportunity to reach them, as the hymn “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship” reminds us.

*Brethren, see poor sinners round you
Slumb’ring on the brink of woe;
Death is coming, hell is moving,
Can you bear to let them go?
See our fathers and our mothers
And our children sinking down;
Brethren, pray, and holy manna
Will be showered all around.*

Our hearts should especially be broken for loved ones who face eternity without Christ as Savior. What can be done? Pray. God answers the prayer of His children. We are assured that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

What would this serving of manna be worth to you to see a wayward family member or neighbor repent of their sin and come back to fellowship with God? To see your fractured church healed of the disunity caused by wolves disguised as sheep? Surely this manna would be sweet indeed. Surely it is worth an hour of intercessory prayer. JDM

Tell Them About the Savior

“Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?” (Exodus 2:7)

In Exodus, Pharaoh ordered the execution of all newborn male Israelites. Moses was spared since his sister intervened, and she later became his helper as he led their people to freedom. Throughout the Bible, godly women played important roles. In “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship,” such women are enjoined to pray for sinners and testify of His power to save.

*Sisters will you join and help us?
Moses’ sister aided him;
Will you help the trembling mourners
Who are struggling hard with sin?
Tell them all about the Savior,
Tell them that He will be found;
Sisters, pray, and holy manna
Will be showered all around.*

In the beginning, “God created man in his own image... male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27). As God’s image bearers, godly women are equipped to minister to others, often being especially effective in attending to individual needs. In our hauntingly beautiful study hymn, such women are called to help trembling sinners convicted of and struggling with sin.

Women can be powerful in prayer. Lasting fruit is borne in ladies’ Bible studies and in children’s Bible lessons taught by godly women. Many rescue missions, mission fields, and counseling rooms are primarily staffed by ladies unashamed of the gospel. Thankfully, God has chosen to shower “manna all around” through the ministry of godly Christian women. JDM

Thursday, March 21

Pray, Oh Pray

“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas...and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:29-30)

The well-known account of the Philippian jailer is mentioned in the hymn “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship.” Paul and Silas were wrongly imprisoned for the gospel’s sake, yet they “prayed, and sang praises unto God” (Acts 16:25). God answered their prayer, and the jailer turned to them for rescue. This was the start of ministry on the European continent.

*Is there here a trembling jailer,
Seeking grace, and filled with tears?
Is there here a weeping Mary,
Pouring forth a flood of tears?
Brethren, join your cries to help them;
Sisters, let your prayers abound;
Pray, Oh pray that holy manna
May be scattered all around.*

The “weeping Mary” is either the mourning sister of Lazarus (John 11) or Mary Magdalene, who met her risen Lord outside the tomb (John 20:11-15). All the tears were very real. Heartache and tears should drive us to prayer, to the One who can answer, fill, and heal.

We are told that if we pray “according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:15). But even if we don’t know His will in a particular situation, we can still pray, for “the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

So, brothers and sisters, pray. JDM

Friday, March 22

Manna at the Banquet Table

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”
(Mark 12:30-31)

The hymn “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship” is summarized in the moving lines of its final verse.

*Let us love our God supremely,
Let us love each other, too;
Let us love and pray for sinners,
Till our God makes all things new.
Then He'll call us home to heaven,
At His table we'll sit down;
Christ will gird Himself, and serve us
With sweet manna all around.*

The Christian's blessings include daily “manna” (provision and blessing) from God and the promise of life with Christ throughout eternity. Our union with Him is compared to a marriage, commencing with a sumptuous wedding feast: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:7-8). “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

When He comes and claims His bride—the ones for whom He sacrificed His precious blood—He will usher us all into His banquet room. Then “he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (Luke 12:37). JDM

Saturday, March 23

Worship and Praise

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

Praise and worship are widely taught in Scripture but are seldom used to describe the same actions. “Worship” describes an attitude of obeisance and reverence (usually by bowing or prostrating) during a formal act of sacrifice or some other structured observance. “Praise,” especially this word used in Psalm 138, emphasizes joyous thanksgiving, recognizing God’s specific blessing or God’s worthiness in character, power, deed, or authority.

There are only two events recorded in Scripture where the people of God both “worshipped” and “praised” at the same time. The first was at the dedication of the great temple of Solomon. When the prayer of dedication was finished, the fire of God’s glory descended on the temple and entered the Holy of Holies. That awesome event drove everyone to their knees “with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and [they] worshipped, and praised the LORD” (2 Chronicles 7:3).

The other occurred right after Ezra led a remnant back from Babylon. As the people heard the Word read to them for the first time in many decades, they became so convicted of their disobedience that they began to cry and confess their sin. They stood for about three hours and “confessed [same word as ‘praise’], and worshipped the LORD their God” (Nehemiah 9:3).

In neither case did the people jump up and down, clap, or otherwise demonstrate exuberance. They were so overwhelmed at the presence of God that they fell down on their faces! Then they poured out their heart in intimate worship and praise for His lovingkindness, His truth, His name, His being, and His attributes, because God has magnified His Word above all His Name. HMM III

Sunday, March 24

When Christ Is Welcome

“Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.” (Psalm 118:26)

This is the climactic verse of Psalm 118, one of the great Messianic psalms. It was fulfilled, at least in a preliminary way, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a small donkey just one week before His resurrection, thereby acknowledging that He was fulfilling Zechariah’s prophecy: “behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding...upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zechariah 9:9).

As He rode into the city, many “took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord” (John 12:13). Many Christians even today still commemorate that occasion on what they call Palm Sunday, one week before Easter.

But most of the people—now as well as then—doubted and soon repudiated Him altogether, crying out for Him to be put to death. He knew, of course, that this is what would happen, and He had already said: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ...! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate:...Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:34-35).

The prophecy applied especially to the nation as a whole, but the principle certainly applies also to individuals. When anyone sees in his mind’s eye the Lord Jesus coming, if he will welcome Him gladly rather than turn Him away, then Christ will indeed come into his heart, “having salvation” and bringing “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8), and he can say with deep thanks: “Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” HMM

Monday, March 25

Asleep in Jesus

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

The hope of the Christian is the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the rapture of living believers at His second coming. This is the primary theme of this epistle—especially verses 4:13–5:10. In fact, it is significant that this book, possibly the first of Paul’s epistles chronologically, is also the one with the largest number of specific references to Christ’s second coming.

If it were not for *this* hope, we would have no hope for the future. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ,” Paul said, “we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19). When an unbeliever dies, he dies without hope. When a believer dies, he is simply “asleep,” as far as his body is concerned. At the same time, his soul and spirit go to be with the Lord until the resurrection day. Perhaps it is analogous to the state of dreaming, when the body is asleep in bed, while the person’s consciousness seems to be engaged in varied activities far from where the body is resting.

The Bible uses the term “sleep” to describe death only in the case of Christians—never for non-Christians (see John 11:11; etc.). There is genuine sorrow, of course, when a believer dies, but that sorrow is softened and sublimated by the “blessed hope” of Christ’s return (Titus 2:13). “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). The souls of those whose bodies are asleep have gone to be with the Lord and will return with the Lord when He returns. “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” (vv. 16-17). HMM

Tuesday, March 26

Learning to Trust

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.” (Psalm 138:7)

David makes three simple points in his final admonition to those who struggle with trusting in God’s lovingkindness and truth.

First, God loves His saints, but those with a pride problem are not going to gain His attention (Psalm 138:6). This is somewhat basic to Christian doctrine. Pride is one of the seven things that God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19). God responds to the desire of the humble person (Psalm 10:17), and He stays near to those who have a broken heart or a contrite spirit (Psalm 34:17).

Second, God will revive us when we are in trouble (our text). The promise is about the *reviving* and the *saving*. That is, we may gain God’s sufficient grace to endure (as in the case of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” 2 Corinthians 12:7) rather than a physical cure. We may receive the ability to be victorious in the face of opposition (as during Paul’s ministry to Ephesus, 1 Corinthians 16:8-9) rather than relief from the circumstances. We may, indeed, be delivered from the pressure of the enemies or have God’s miracle performed in our lives, but whatever the circumstantial occasion, God will respond for our good.

Third, God will bring about our perfection (Psalm 138:8). That term, both in the Old and the New Testaments, relates to completing God’s work or purpose. Here, it is specifically related to that which concerns the saints of God. The sovereign Lord will see to it that His chosen will make it (1 Peter 2:9). There is no question about this. God’s mercy is always refreshed. There is no limit to His forgiveness. Nothing about who we are will defeat God’s plan for us (Philippians 2:13).
HMM III

Wednesday, March 27

Contend for the Faith

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 1:3)

Jude long ago addressed a problem in his day that is still very real in our day among Christians. It is easier and more comfortable just to teach and preach about the blessings of our common salvation than it is to contend for the faith, but the latter is more “needful.” The word conveys the idea that he was so constrained, evidently by the Holy Spirit, as actually to be in distress about this compelling need. Similarly, his exhortation to “earnestly contend” does not mean to “be argumentative” but rather to “agonize with intense determination.” It is one word in the Greek, *epagonizomai* (literally, “agonize over”). Defending and contending for the faith is serious, urgent business.

That which we are to defend is “the faith”—the whole body of Christian truth—wherever it is under attack. It would, of course, be especially important to contend for the doctrine of special creation, which is the foundation of all others and is the doctrine perpetually under the most concerted and persistent attack by the adversary.

That faith has been, long ago, “once delivered” to the saints. The sense of these words is “once for all turned over for safekeeping.” The Lord has entrusted us with His Word, completed and inscripturated, and we must keep it, uncorrupted and intact, for every generation until He returns, preaching and teaching all of it to every creature, to the greatest extent we possibly can.

Finally, note that the safeguarding of the faith was not entrusted merely to specially trained theologians or other professionals, but also to “the saints.” Every Christian believer is commanded to “earnestly contend for the faith.” HMM

Thursday, March 28

Gambling at Calvary

“They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” (Psalm 22:18)

The 22nd Psalm is justly famous as a remarkable prophetic preview of the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, written by David approximately 1,000 years before it was fulfilled. It describes in accurate detail the sufferings of the Lord and the actions of the sneering spectators as they watched Him die.

One of the most heartless acts of the Roman soldiers carrying out the crucifixion was the indignity of stripping Him of the garments He was wearing and then dividing them among themselves, even gambling to determine who would get His seamless vesture. The significance of this cruel scene is indicated by the fact that it is one of the very few specific events in the life of Christ recorded in all four gospels.

We must not forget that the Lord Jesus Christ once had been arrayed, as it were, in beautiful garments that “smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces” (Psalm 45:8). But He who was “equal with God” chose to be “made in the likeness of men” that He might eventually suffer “even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6-8) in order to save our unworthy souls. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

He who had created the heavens, when He came to Earth, had to say that “the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). And His few remaining possessions were scavenged by His executioners as He died. Yet through His great sacrifice, He has provided “everlasting habitations” for us (Luke 16:9) and “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3). Indeed, we do know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! HMM

Friday, March 29

He Shall Prolong His Days

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” (Isaiah 53:10)

In this one verse, found in the wonderful 53rd chapter of Isaiah, there is an amazing prophecy of the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ in atonement for our sins, His resurrection from the dead, and the resulting salvation of many lost sinners.

This Old Testament chapter, written 600 years before Christ, contains probably the most complete and cogent exposition of the saving work of Christ on the cross to be found in the entire Bible.

How could it “please” the Lord to bruise His only begotten Son? It could only be because of the great work this would accomplish.

Then, indeed, “the pleasure of the LORD” would be realized. As to the Son, “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11).

After the Father has allowed the enemies of His Son to “bruise him” to death, it would be soon known that this was actually “an offering for sin” and that, having satisfied the requirements of God’s holiness, the Son “shall prolong his days.” Though He died and actually “made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (v. 9), death could not hold Him and “he shall prolong his days.” As He would later proclaim: “I am alive for evermore” (Revelation 1:18).

And because He has done this, He “shall see his seed.” “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10). What a wonderful Savior! HMM

Saturday, March 30

The Doctrine of Christ

“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.”
(2 John 1:10)

This apparently harsh instruction seems at first to conflict with the many biblical exhortations to show hospitality, but it needs to be placed in context. The one-chapter epistle of 2 John was addressed to “the elect lady and her children” by John, who also extended greetings from “the children of thy elect sister” (vv. 1, 13). These unusual phrases, together with the general tone of the epistle, make it almost certain that John was not referring simply to two individual Christian women, but to two churches, symbolically personified as two noble ladies with the “children” being the new converts in the churches.

The warning, then, is primarily against the danger of allowing a false teacher to come into the church, as a pastor or a teacher or even as a visiting speaker, who would not bring “this doctrine.” The doctrine mentioned is obviously “the doctrine of Christ” (v. 9). This doctrine of Christ is not, however, simply a set of doctrinal tenets about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not the doctrine about Christ, but of Christ—belonging to Him—*His* doctrine. The word “doctrine” is *didache*, meaning literally “teachings.” The meaning clearly is “the teachings of Christ,” that is, not just one or two least-common-denominator statements about Christ to which all nominal Christians could give assent, but the entire body of teachings that had come from Jesus.

Further, since He taught that all the Old Testament is inspired and authoritative and also promised the same to the writers of the New Testament, this “doctrine of Christ” includes “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), from Genesis through Revelation. How important it is not to allow false teaching to get a foothold in a local church. HMM

Sunday, March 31

Alive with Christ

“Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more domination over him.” (Romans 6:8-9)

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead both guarantees the future bodily resurrection of the believer and associates us *positionally* with Him now. Since He died for our sins, we, in effect, were “dead with Christ.” Therefore, when He defeated death and hell and revived His own dead body in immortal power, He broke any dominion of death over Him or over those who were, positionally, *with* Him.

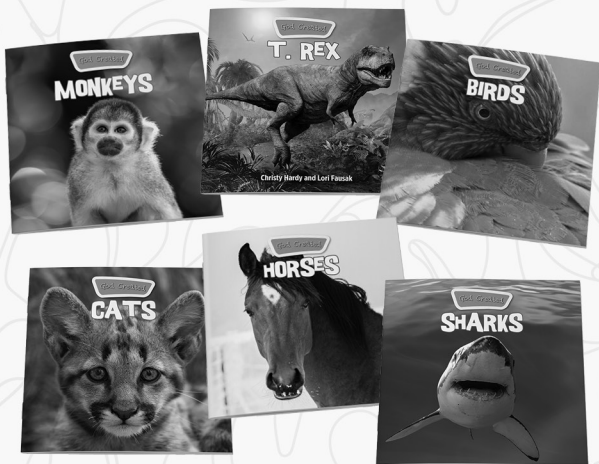
This is one of the grandest scriptural themes of the Christian life. We were dead with Christ, but now God “hath quickened us together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5). Not only have we been “made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22) with Him, but we have also been “raised” with Him up from the grave and then into heaven where we are “seated” with Him on His throne! “[God] hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

This means also that we have been glorified with Him and are actually reigning with Him. “The Spirit [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:...that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16-17).

But if all this is only true in position, what meaning does His resurrection life have on our daily lives now? Simply this—that *knowing* these truths gives us the incentive and power to live them. “If [or literally since] ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). “For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you” (2 Corinthians 13:4). HMM

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Monday, April 1

Christ Our Intercessor

“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)

One of the most glorious truths of the Christian life is that the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification, now lives to intercede for us before God. The greatest example of intercessory prayer in the Bible is in John 17, where the Lord poured out His heart for His disciples. “I pray for them,” He said, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine” (John 17:9). But that was not all! “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” (John 17:20). And that’s us! That includes us!

What is it that He prays for us? First of all, He prays for our *security*. “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11). Then He prays that we might have real victory over sin and the devil. “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [or ‘the evil one’]” (John 17:15).

His next request is: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Our *sanctification* will come, therefore, not through some special experience but through God’s Word. He also prays for true unity among His true disciples: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).

Finally, He prays for our ultimate *glorification*. “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” (John 17:24).

We can be assured that the Father will grant these requests of His beloved Son. HMM

Tuesday, April 2

Sodom and Gomorrha

“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, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” (Jude 1:7)

These cities provide two stern examples of God’s judgmental wrath. Their sin had reached such an intensity and had become so widespread that the entire region suffered the “vengeance of eternal fire.” Just like the awful misuse of human sexual potential distorted by the angelic beings cited in the previous verse, these cities had become so perverted that God’s longsuffering and mercy had ended.

“But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly” (Genesis 13:13). Whatever they were involved with had become so heinous and so completely a distortion of everything God created man for that God appears to have reached the limit of human vocabulary to describe it. Their character (wickedness) and their deeds (sins) were “too much” for God.

Two classifications are listed. The first, fornication, is cited nearly 100 times in the Old Testament and is referred to over a dozen times in the New—always as a condemnation of sexual behavior outside of the intimate relations of husband and wife. The other classification is going after “strange flesh.” Genesis 19 makes it perfectly clear that this “exceedingly” awful sin was homosexual perversion.

For these sins God rained down “brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24). The Scripture is precisely clear: vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19), and He made Himself absolutely clear about His view of widespread fornication and homosexual behavior. This example is a sobering warning for those societies that promote such lifestyles. HMM III

Wednesday, April 3

Knowing and Trusting

“And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.” (Psalm 9:10)

When one really knows the name of the Lord, that one will surely come to trust Him. How could anyone fail to trust God and to believe His Word when they know Him to be the almighty Creator (*Elohim*), the self-existing One (*Jehovah*), and the gracious Master (*Adonai*)? When they further learn that He is none other than Jesus Christ (“anointed Savior”), surely they ought to believe and bow in thankful love, calling Him “Lord” by the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The word for “trust” means “take refuge in.” We can trust our Lord for protection from harm, from want, from all the attacks of the wicked one, and finally, from hell itself. That trust is well placed because the Lord never forsakes those who truly trust Him. The Word confirms this truth over and over again. “(For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers” (Deuteronomy 4:31). “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). These are glorious promises, always fulfilled—that is, with one exception.

The only man who always fully trusted God, who was altogether righteous, and who perfectly manifested the Father’s name to His disciples and to the world—that One was forsaken! “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” He cried, as He died on the cross (Matthew 27:46).

And it was because *He* was willing to be forsaken and to suffer hell itself in our place—dying for our sins—that God can make and keep His promise never to forsake anyone who seeks Him and puts their trust in Him, through Jesus Christ. HMM

Thursday, April 4

Filthy Dreamers

“Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.” (Jude 1:8)

The King James translators supplied the term “filthy” for the dreamers that Jude denounces because of the “likewise” that introduces their condemnation. The prior verses had condemned certain angels and the populations of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their perversion of God’s sexual design.

These dreamers not only “stain” the flesh but have become so arrogant that they give “no standing” to any authority and “blaspheme” those who have any “glory.” Not even Michael the archangel had that kind of attitude; Jude notes in the next verse that Michael didn’t rebuke Lucifer when he was carrying out God’s mission for Moses’ body. Some people are way out of line!

Jude’s whole message is focused on those who are attempting to resist, undo, damage, distort, or otherwise disrupt the work of God’s people. In the context, these dreamers are not merely inattentive fools who wander in and out of churches seeking some personal “fulfillment”; they are enemies within—those who may have positions of influence and who are actively seeking to hurt the ministry and mission of God’s kingdom.

Peter calls them “presumptuous” and “selfwilled,” no better than “natural brute beasts” who mouth off about “things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption” (2 Peter 2:10-12). Strong words, but a fitting description of those who would dare to set themselves against the omnipotent and omniscient Creator. As David so aptly says: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1).

Dialogue with these dreamers is futile. The solution is: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). HMM III

Friday, April 5

Strong and Courageous

“And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.” (1 Chronicles 28:20)

This admonition—to be strong and of good courage—is found 11 times in the Bible—thrice on the lips of Moses, five times in Joshua, then twice from David, and once from Hezekiah. Although these all involved specific challenges confronting God’s people at the time, the principles behind them indicate the need for courage of conviction for God’s people at all times.

The first occurrence is in the command given by Moses to the Israelites just before his death as they were about to enter the promised land. “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Deuteronomy 31:6). In the next verse, Moses gave a similar exhortation to Joshua, their leader.

The next-to-last occurrence is in our text, containing almost the same words as in the first occurrence, with David this time exhorting Solomon to build the great temple in Jerusalem. Whether entering a new field of service for God or beginning a great work for God, the people of God will encounter opposition and must be strong and courageous to carry it through.

The word “courage” occurs more in Joshua than in any other book of the Bible, and this specific exhortation is given five times: three by God, once by the people to Joshua, and once by Joshua to the people. In all these, the context stresses obedience to the Word of God, especially in resistance to sin and pagan belief systems. Especially significant is God’s command: “Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law...that thou mayest prosper” (Joshua 1:7). HMM

Saturday, April 6

The Song of Creation

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.... When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7)

It is significant that there was singing at the very time of creation. The “morning stars” of this verse are, by Hebrew poetic parallelism, the same as the “sons of God” who were present when God “laid the foundations of the earth.” Similarly, “sang together” is parallel with “shouted for joy.”

It is thus beautifully appropriate to sing of the glories of God’s creation, for angels were doing this even before Adam and Eve were created! The first actual human song mentioned in the Bible, however, was the thanksgiving song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-21) composed and sung by Moses and the children of Israel after their deliverance from Pharaoh and the waters of the sea.

Finally, it is significant that the last song mentioned in the Bible is “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Revelation 15:3), sung in heaven by “them that had gotten the victory over the beast” (v. 2). This presumably refers back to the original song of Moses, since the deliverance from Pharaoh was, spiritually, a type of their triumph over the beast, the great world ruler in the end times. However, it must now be combined with the song of the Lamb, probably the “new song” of the saints at the Lamb’s throne in Revelation 5:8-10, praising the Lord for their redemption through His blood, shed in substitution for their sins.

These should surely be the three major themes of Christian music, for these are the main themes of the Bible’s songs. It is fitting that they should refer to the past, present, and future works of Christ—His mighty work of creation in the beginning, His gracious work of sustenance in the present, and His glorious work of full redemption in the future. HMM

Sunday, April 7

As I Have Loved

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”
(John 13:34)

No Christian could ever question the preeminent importance of love. “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), and the greatest of the Christian virtues is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). The first and second commandments of the law are love for God and love for one’s neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Christ’s *new* commandment, however, gives us a *definition* of love! To love as He loved, we must observe how Christ loved.

In the first place, His love was not ephemeral. “When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1).

The Lord Jesus Himself defined love this way: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). However, Christ died not only for His friends but for all sinners, including His bitter enemies. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him....Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:9-11).

The measure of love is the undeserved, yet gladly offered, substitutionary death of Christ for our sins. Whenever we think the love commandment is demanding too much of us, we should compare our love to His. “For the love of Christ constraineth us [not our love for Him, but His love for us]...that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19), and we must live for Him. HMM

Brute Beasts

“But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.” (Jude 1:10)

Both Jude and Peter use essentially the same terms when they speak of people who are like “brute beasts” (2 Peter 2:12). Both use the qualifying adjective “natural” to draw a precise distinction between those who are only alive physically and those who have been given eternal life by the Spirit of God.

Prior to being twice-born, all men are “by *nature* the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3) and have not yet been given “the *divine* nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4). Such “natural” people are “*sensual*, having not the Spirit” (Jude 1:19) and therefore cannot receive “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).

These strong pictures are not incidental for understanding the challenge to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). Jude and Peter are describing the intransigence of those who resist the truth—especially of the “tares” who have been planted by the Enemy among the “wheat” in the Lord’s field (Matthew 13:24-30).

The Greek term translated “brute” by both Jude and Peter is a combination of the negative particle *a* and the basic word for intelligent communication, *logos*. We must therefore expect the resistance to take form “without reason.” The unsaved cannot understand God’s message without the transformation of the new birth. Their efforts to undermine “the faith” will always be based on human (natural) reasoning.

Contending for the faith will always be a “labour, *striving* according to his working” (Colossians 1:29). May God grant us a “good fight,” having “kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). HMM III

Tuesday, April 9

Occupied Territory

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

In our ongoing struggle for both survival and victory in this world, we do well to recognize that we are in enemy territory. While it is true that our Captain created the world—indeed, “all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3)—and sacrificed His life to redeem it and will reign over it for eternity, it is also true that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19), occupied by “the prince of this world” (John 12:31) who is “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2).

The fact that we are surrounded by such darkness should come as no surprise, for before we were rescued by His grace, we too were part of the darkness—indeed, we had to be called out of it. John the Baptist came “to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79). Furthermore, as Christ taught, “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

This confrontation overshadows mere human conflict, however, “for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). But, praise God, we have been called “out of darkness into his marvellous light” as described in our text. Although we may still be in the world, our King has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13). “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). JDM

Wednesday, April 10

The Trinity and the Christian

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”
(2 Corinthians 13:14)

The doctrine of the triune God is unique to Christianity. There is only one God yet three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each with His own distinct relation to mankind but each equally, fully, and eternally God. Although these truths are implicit throughout the New Testament, the doctrine of the Trinity is seldom, if ever, presented explicitly as a formal doctrine.

There are several passages, however, where all three Persons are mentioned in the same context, and each one deals with a significant aspect of the Christian life. There is, first of all, the provision of salvation, “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God” (Hebrews 9:14). Then follows regeneration. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). Salvation and regeneration are then publicly testified in baptism “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

The chief resource of the believer is prayer, and this also involves all three Persons. “For through [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). He must also continue to learn of Christ and to bear witness of Him. “The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26). “The Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness” (John 15:26-27).

Finally, in the words of our text, we have eternal assurance in the triune God. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” HMM

Thursday, April 11

Cain's Way

“Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.” (Jude 1:11)

Jude compares the awful examples of three Old Testament characters to leaders in the New Testament church who have used their influence for evil. Cain was the first child of Adam and Eve and had every opportunity to excel. Yet, he chose a “way” that not only ended in the horrible murder of his brother but also resulted in an entire culture in rebellion against God.

The murder was preceded by a flagrant disobedience that was expressed when the family came to offer their sacrifices to the Creator. Cain brought an offering of the “fruit” of his own labor from tilling the ground. Abel’s offering was a “firstling” from the flock that he kept (Genesis 4:3-5). Why did God “respect” Abel’s offering and not Cain’s?

God’s commentary on this event (Hebrews 11:4) tells us that Abel “obtained witness” that his sacrifice was a righteous action that testified of his obedience. The Genesis account does not give much information, but it is clear that the first family were following instructions—likely emulating the sacrifice that God made to clothe Adam and Eve after they sinned (Genesis 3:21).

Cain began a “way” many years before (a lifestyle, a broad road) that turned his heart away from simple obedience to God’s instructions. Cain’s occupation (farmer) was certainly okay. He provided food for the growing world population. But when the regular sacrifice came due, Cain decided that he would “show” God his own works rather than follow God’s requirement of bringing an innocent life in sacrifice.

That way, of course, is the way “which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). HMM III

Friday, April 12

Balaam's Error

“Woe unto them! for they...ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.” (Jude 1:11)

Balaam is a very complex character recorded in Numbers 22–24. He is cited for an ability to communicate with “the LORD” and had a reputation for accurate prophecy (Numbers 22:6-8). As the new nation of Israel traveled northward into the Sinai Peninsula, Balak the king of Moab became worried that Israel would subjugate his nation and recruited Balaam to curse them.

Balaam “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15) but was astute enough to know that he could not talk God into doing anything God did not want to do! But even though Balaam was aware of the dangers of getting involved on the wrong side of God’s work, he wormed and squirmed through several interchanges with God until he was finally allowed to go. “God’s anger was kindled” at the stubbornness of this man, and the famous interchange with the donkey took place (Numbers 22:22-31).

Still Balaam persisted with his venture for Balak of Moab and “ran greedily” after the reward that he had been promised. When he arrived at the place where he planned to curse Israel, Balaam knew enough about the correct sacrifices to build the right kinds of altars and sacrifice the right kinds of animals, then he proceeded to seek God’s “word” for Israel. Three times God “put a word” in Balaam’s mouth to bless Israel, and three times Balak insisted that he try again to curse them.

Instead of repenting of his foolishness, Balaam bragged about his ability to know what God wanted and “taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel” (Revelation 2:14). Those who prostitute the gifts of God for their own profit will come under a “greater condemnation” (James 3:1). May God protect us from the Balaams among the churches. HMM III

Saturday, April 13

Korah's Dispute

“Woe unto them! for they have...perished in the gainsaying of Core.” (Jude 1:11)

Jude describes the Levite Korah's rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16) as an *antilogia* (to speak against, dispute, contradict). During that time, Moses and Aaron were the spokespersons for the Lord, with authority and direct instructions from God. The Scriptures take that place today.

Korah and 250 other “princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown” (Numbers 16:2) had decided that they were just as “holy” as Moses and were demanding some share of the leadership (and presumably some of the control). This was far more than a mere leadership struggle.

Israel had just come through several major miracles (Red Sea parting, manna, water from the rock, etc.), had been given the Ten Commandments, and had built the tabernacle. They had rejected the report of Joshua and Caleb on God's promise about Canaan and were in the middle of trying to choose a captain to “return into Egypt” (Numbers 14:4). God was really angry with them!

Korah led this “gainsaying” in an attempt to thwart God's direction through Moses. Today, that would be equivalent to insisting that science (or philosophy or theology) is just as holy as the text of Scripture. God's method of testing this *antilogia* was simple: each leader was to prepare his own censer and incense (equivalent to his interpretation of God's Word) and see how God responded to him.

They perished in a most spectacular display of ruin—“the ground clave asunder that was under them” and they “went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation” (Numbers 16:31, 33). God does not tolerate rejection of His message, “for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psalm 138:2).
HMM III

Sunday, April 14

Commitment to God

“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.” (Psalm 37:5)

Frustration must come as the saints of God battle with evil forces. The pain and pressure of torment are nonetheless real as these evil “devices” (Isaiah 32:7) take their toll on the people of God. The Lord will destroy the plans of the wicked (Psalm 33:10), but while those plans are active, they can cause much hurt.

Nevertheless, we must maintain trust in the Lord and commit our lives to Him if we are to be victorious. The unusual Hebrew word *galal* used here is more often translated as “roll on” or “roll with” something. It seems to imply a unity in the commitment, that the committed one is bound up in the actions or activities of the thing or person committed to—we “roll on” or “roll with” the Lord in our “way.”

Paul spends much of his letter to the Philippians describing the link between the Creator-Savior and the mind, heart, and lifestyle of the Christian who has given his life over to God. “Being confident of this very thing,” Paul says, “that he which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). We are to “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).

While admitting that he had not yet “attained,” Paul was so focused on the work of the kingdom that he was “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). God’s promise to “bring it to pass” is *conditioned* on our being *committed* to His sovereign will for our “way.” HMM III

Monday, April 15

Answered by a Word from God

*“And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.”
(Matthew 22:46)*

The two dominant sects among the Jews at the time of Christ were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Although both of these believed in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, they both refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

A climactic confrontation occurred during His final week in Jerusalem. Each group tried to trap Him into a compromising doctrinal argument. To the Sadducees, who rejected the doctrine of resurrection, He said: “Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31-32). This exposition silenced the Sadducees.

“But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence” (Matthew 22:34), they then tried to trip Him up. He turned the tables on them by a reference to the 110th Psalm, asking how David could call the Messiah Lord if He was David’s son (Matthew 22:45). As our text indicates, they also were unable to respond.

It is most significant that each group was silenced with one single word from the Scriptures. To the Sadducees, the word was “am” (“I am the God of Abraham” [v. 32]), indicating that Abraham was still living. To the Pharisees, the word was “Lord” (“The LORD said unto my Lord” [v. 44]; that is, “*Jehovah* said unto *Adonai*”), proving that the Messiah was both human and divine, descended from David but also David’s Lord. Christ’s argumentation was based in each case on the determinative authority of just one word in the Scriptures. For Christ, the Scriptures were inerrant and of full and final authority, and they could not answer His claims without rejecting the Scriptures they professed to believe. HMM

Tuesday, April 16

All the Lonely People

“I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” (Psalm 142:4)

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. To be all alone, not knowing where to find refuge from problems that bear heavily at times—this is the lot of many lonely people.

Sometimes, of course, one’s feelings of loneliness may be because of unconfessed sin, as when David lamented after his crime of adultery and murder: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me” (Psalm 32:3-4). Outwardly silent, but inwardly roaring—that’s the way it is when a believer tries to rationalize and hide his sin from God and man. The remedy in such a case is obvious: “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Psalm 32:5).

When the problem is not one of unconfessed sin, the Lord is always there to comfort and guide, if we ask Him. Following the sad complaint of our text, David made a statement of hope and faith. “The righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me” (Psalm 142:7).

There was a time, in fact, when the Lord Himself was all alone. When He was arrested, “then all the disciples forsook him, and fled” (Matthew 26:56). But that was not the worst of it. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus died all alone on the cross—the loneliest and most forsaken person in all human history—since even His heavenly Father had to abandon Him when He took our sins and died for us. Thus, He understands our own need and is always there. “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted [or ‘tested’], he is able to succor them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). HMM

Wednesday, April 17

A More Sure 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, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19)

In this important passage, Peter explains the ultimate source of his writings. He did not merely repeat cunningly devised fables when he taught majestic things about the Lord Jesus Christ but was himself an “eyewitness” of His glory and personally heard the very voice of God on the Mount of Transfiguration (vv. 16-18). The three chosen disciples witnessed His prophesied glory and heard God speak of Christ’s pleasing Sonship. There could be no doubt of God’s special plan for His Son. As eyewitnesses, they bore the onus of bearing witness to the facts.

But Peter downplayed the importance of his own personal testimony, even though it was a firsthand account and quite important, and he knew it was absolutely correct. The “more sure word of prophecy” he recommended, however, that outshines any human testimony was the written Word of God, for the Transfiguration confirmed numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ. Prophecies already fulfilled multiply our confidence in the rest of Scripture.

Oral or written testimony of human observers, no matter how trustworthy they may be, is still subject to human error and not “inerrant” in the same way as Scripture. Christians must always remember that the written Word of God is more certain than personal memories or impressions. The experiences we have must never be viewed as validating God’s Word. Rather, God’s Word validates our experiences. The early church only had a few portions of the New Testament in those days of beginning, but thankfully, we have it all and have ready access to it. Peter recognized it as superior to any personal testimony. How much more should we deem it trustworthy and authoritative? JDM

Thursday, April 18

Disobedient Angels

“And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 1:6)

This passage is one of two New Testament references to angelic beings who misused their powers in some unique way. 2 Peter 2:4 notes: “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.”

It is likely that these two passages refer to the same event. If so, several key elements have been written for our awareness. First, of course, even angels are not excluded from judgment. They, along with Lucifer and Gabriel and Michael (the three archangels named in Scripture), were created beings who are “greater in power and might” than men (2 Peter 2:11).

The reference in Genesis 6:1-4 to the “sons of God” choosing multiple wives and producing “giants” has been a source of controversy for some time. There is no question that the Hebrew phrase *bene Elohim* translated as “sons of God” refers to angelic beings. If Jude and Peter are referring to the incident in Genesis, then the problem arises about the ability of angelic beings to conceive human half-breed demigods.

Biblical evidence would insist that the angelic “kind” cannot interbreed with any other “kind” created by God during the creation week. Angels can assume human shape and can control and/or possess bodies of flesh. That much is clear in Scripture. Therefore, the unique sin that Jude and Peter seem to speak of is that some angels usurped their responsibility as “servants” for humanity and directed a human “breeding” program to further rebellion against the Creator.

That would surely qualify as a special sin deserving of God’s imprisonment and a sober warning for any of us who might dare think we can escape God’s judgment. HMM III

Friday, April 19

Ministering Spirits

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)

Although most Christians are aware of the biblical doctrine of angels, few appreciate what a tremendous resource this may be. Even though they are invisible to us, angels are real and are more involved in our personal lives than we realize.

The primary purpose for which they were created by God was, according to our text, to be servants (i.e., “ministers”) to those who are to inherit salvation. They are beings of great wisdom, “to know all things that are in the earth” (2 Samuel 14:20). Furthermore, they “excel in strength” (Psalm 103:20). They can travel at tremendous speeds, “being caused to fly swiftly” (Daniel 9:21). Furthermore, there exists “an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22), so God is able to dispatch any necessary number of them to “do his commandments” (Psalm 103:20) on behalf of His people.

Since their very existence is related to the heirs of salvation, they are intensely interested in all of God’s plans and in our own individual roles in those plans—“which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12). They serve as guardian angels (Psalm 34:7; 91:11), especially in relation to children (Matthew 18:10). They are present in each local church (Revelation 2:1; etc.), and while they minister to the church, they also themselves learn “by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:10). They are directly involved in the accomplishment of many providential miracles such as Daniel in the lion’s den (Daniel 6:22). Finally, they accompany each believer at death into the presence of the Lord (Luke 16:22; 2 Corinthians 5:8).

Perhaps, in that day, we’ll meet the particular angels who have been assigned to our own protection and guidance and can thank them properly. HMM

Saturday, April 20

Hidden Rocks

“These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear.” (Jude 1:12)

The “spots” that the translators chose for this description by Jude may be better understood as “hidden rocks” just below a lake’s surface or covered over by shallow sand in a pathway. *Spilas* is the Greek word, not used elsewhere in the New Testament.

The feasts that Jude refers to are somewhat difficult to describe biblically since this is the only time the word *agape* is used in the plural. There is some evidence that the early churches were extending the time of celebration of the Lord’s Supper improperly (1 Corinthians 11:20-21), and it is probable that his warning would apply to churches that are indifferent to maintaining purity (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

But the imagery also appears to express the danger that the “spots” present amidst the loving environment of most churches. Jude gives several insights about the character of those who would resist “the faith.” These people have established themselves as they feast and are “feeding themselves without fear.” The word choices are powerful.

The spots are *suneuocheo* (feeding with) and getting along very well with the rest of the church, shepherding themselves (*poimaino*) boldly (*aphobos*). This is bad! These evil men have become so entrenched that they lead their own faction with no fear of resistance or confrontation. The Lord Jesus has stern words to speak to those churches that allow biblical error to establish itself through false teachers and unconcerned leaders (Revelation 2–3).

Peter describes such people as “spots...and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you...that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls” (2 Peter 2:13-14). Not a pretty picture. God does not tolerate such ungodly behavior, and neither should we. HMM III

Sunday, April 21

Love Thy Neighbor

“But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29)

This question was asked Jesus by a “lawyer” (one who specialized in the interpretation and application of the more than 600 commandments of the Old Testament) in response to Jesus’ affirmation that the greatest commandments of the law were, first, to love God, and second, to love “thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:39).

The Lord Jesus answered his question by telling the famous story of the good Samaritan, concluding by saying: “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37). From this parable are derived several important principles concerning neighbors and what it means to love them.

In the first place, a neighbor is not necessarily someone whose home is near ours, or even one who is an acquaintance. The Samaritan had never met the traveler who had been robbed and wounded, nor was he even a fellow countryman.

However, there were three criteria that, in the mind of Christ, did make him a neighbor: (1) he was someone whose path had crossed that of the Samaritan; (2) he had a real need; and (3) the Samaritan had the ability to meet that need. Since all three criteria were satisfied, then there was such an obligation, and the Lord has told us to do likewise.

It is such an action that is involved in “loving” one’s neighbor in the same way we love ourselves. It is doing what we would want to have done for us if the roles were reversed. However, there is still something more to it than that: the “love” of which the Lord spoke here is the well-known *agape* love that describes an unselfish love—one that serves the best interests of the recipient without regard to any benefit for the one who loves. In the highest sense, therefore, a genuine love for one’s neighbor would mean seeking the will of God in and for the one who is loved. HMM

Monday, April 22

Christ Our Passover

“And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:13)

The Jews of the world have been keeping their annual Feast of the Passover for almost 3,500 years, fulfilling the ancient prophecy: “And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever” (Exodus 12:24). This was the beginning of the nation of Israel, when they left Egyptian slavery behind and started their trek to the promised land. The lamb had been slain and eaten, its blood placed on the door posts, and the Lord had spared all their firstborn sons when the Destroyer passed through the land of Egypt.

The feast was intended not only to memorialize the ancient deliverance but also to anticipate the coming day when the “Lamb of God” would take “away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The night before Christ was crucified, He told His disciples, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16).

Thereupon, the Lord established His Supper, which Christians will continue to observe to “shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). He fulfilled all that the Passover prophesied when He shed His blood on the cross, “for even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast,...with...sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Now we look forward to an even greater supper when Christ returns, for the promise is this to all who believe: “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9). HMM

Tuesday, April 23

Four Cosmologies

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

The cosmos consists of “all things”—every system, every structure, every organism, every process, everything—in heaven and on Earth. Cosmology is the system and study of the whole cosmos. In his final epistle, the apostle Peter outlines four different cosmologies. One is false; the other three are each true but at different times in history.

The false cosmology is that of evolutionary uniformitarianism, the doctrine taught by latter-day intellectuals who will scoff: “Where is the promise of his coming?...all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:4). But this is altogether wrong! The heavens and the earth that were “of old...the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:5-6) were the first cosmos. The primeval cosmos, in which “every thing that he had made ...was very good” (Genesis 1:31), was destroyed in the waters of the great Flood.

The present cosmos is “the heavens and the earth, which are now...reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). This “present evil world” (Galatians 1:4) was to last many a long year, but “the day of the Lord will come...in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise...the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

But then, out of the ashes of the old corrupt world, so to speak, God will make a new and incorruptible world. “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

That cosmos will continue forever! “The new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 66:22). HMM

Waterless Clouds

“Woe unto them!...clouds they are without water, carried about of winds.” (Jude 1:11-12)

This appears to be the only reference in the Bible that compares clouds to people. Several references use cloud imagery to depict the presence of God directing Israel (Exodus 13:21), speaking to Moses (Exodus 16:10-11), anointing the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38) and the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), and speaking to the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). Our Lord Jesus was taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9) and will return in a cloud as well (Luke 21:27).

Here, however, Jude applies a strong negative imagery. Those who introduce evil into the Lord’s churches may seem to represent the presence of God, but their misty vapor holds no “water”—it will only obscure the brilliance of light and obfuscate the real “temperature” of the environment.

In an agrarian-based economy, clouds were hopeful signs of rain to refresh the land. Some of that positive view has been lost by urban societies, which often see rain as an inconvenience. New Testament imagery connects water with life-giving properties emanating from the Holy Spirit and with the cleansing value of the words of Scripture (John 4:14; Ephesians 5:26). Paul warned Pastor Titus about many “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers” who must be stopped so that “good men” would become “sound in the faith” (Titus 1:8-13).

Thus, Jude compares those who hinder “the faith” to those who appear to represent godly pursuits and character but are empty of the refreshing and guiding power of the Holy Spirit and void of biblical wisdom and insight. They are “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14) and “serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:18). HMM III

Thursday, April 25

Fruitless Trees

“Woe unto them!...trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.” (Jude 1:11-12)

Many illustrations in Scripture compare the responsibility of trees to bear fruit and the responsibility of Christians to produce righteousness. The reason for the frequent comparisons is that “a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Luke 6:43). It is easy to tell what kind a tree is because “every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes” (Luke 6:44).

Jude is making the point, however, that there are “trees” planted amidst the orchard of God’s kingdom churches that have withering “fruit” or have already been rooted up as worthless, fruitless, and twice-dead. These trees have absolutely no place among the healthy trees. At best they scar and mar the beauty of the orchard, and at worst they spread their decay and rot throughout it.

Another very important point is that trees that have withered or cannot produce good fruit are not salvageable. All of nature demonstrates and reinforces the eternal principle that “every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit” (Matthew 7:17). Such dead, fruitless trees are to be “hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:10).

The common thread in all of these several pictures by Jude is the damage that can be done by ungodly “tares” among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30), fig trees that should be providing nourishment but do not (Luke 13:6-9), and plants that are choked by “cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19). All of these can spread the “leaven” through the whole “lump” and undermine the work of God (Galatians 5:9). HMM III

Friday, April 26

He Doth Devise Means

“For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.” (2 Samuel 14:14)

These words of the “wise woman of Tekoah,” spoken to King David concerning Absalom, his son, were wiser than she knew, for they reflect a principle of human experience that affects us all. Human life must eventually deteriorate and die; this declension cannot be reversed any more than water poured down on the ground can be “un-poured” up into the cup again.

This principle is the famous law of entropy (“in-turning”). Physical systems wear out; biological organisms get old and die; societies and empires fall and vanish. All these phenomena are local expressions of God’s universal curse on man and all his dominion (Genesis 3:14-19). It applies to everything, without exception.

However, the very existence of the law of entropy points to a Creator because systems that are wearing out must first have been made new, and beings that die must first have been given life. The very idea of a universal naturalistic evolution of all things into more complex systems is contrary to all real scientific data and is contradicted by all human experience.

Nevertheless, the God who created all things can surely “devise means” by which the law of decay can be set aside. Solar energy and the hydrologic cycle can raise the spilled water; the sinful life can be purified by God’s grace and the blood of Christ; and the dead can be revived by the resurrection life of Christ. Someday the Curse itself will be removed when God creates new heavens and a new earth, and the whole creation “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). HMM

Saturday, April 27

One Another

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.”
(1 Thessalonians 4:9)

The Christian life involves both individual accountability and interpersonal involvement. Each of us is individually responsible for maintaining the right sort of relationship with others, especially others in our Christian fellowship.

A beautiful Greek word is *allelon*, often translated “one another.” For example, we are commanded: “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). Furthermore, we are to “be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5), “in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10).

There are many other such admonitions, all built around the beautiful phrase “one another.” Although we have indeed “been called unto liberty,” we are nevertheless to “serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). We are also to “exhort one another daily” (Hebrews 3:13) and to “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Hebrews 10:24). “Use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Peter 4:9). We are told: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

In times of sorrow, Christians are admonished to “comfort one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:18). “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11) and “pray one for another” (James 5:16).

But by far the most frequently repeated admonition is that in our text: “Love one another!” There are no less than 15 times where this command is given in the New Testament. Most significantly of all, it is Christ’s own “new commandment”: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). HMM

Sunday, April 28

The Abounding Life

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8)

Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). This well-known promise is sometimes misapplied, being interpreted to mean that the Christian life would normally be a life of material prosperity, popularity, and happiness. The words “abundantly,” “abounding,” and similar terms are all based on the same Greek word that does, indeed, mean “abundant.” But it can apply to sorrow as well as happiness.

The Christian life, as our text indicates, should be abundant in good works for the simple reason that God’s saving and keeping grace has been manifested abundantly toward us. Having been “stablished in the faith,” we are to be “abounding therein” (Colossians 2:7). Christians, of course, should also “abound in love.” “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you” (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

But the Christian may also experience much sorrow and difficulty in his life. Paul was a classic example: “...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths off” (2 Corinthians 11:23). One may also abound in poverty. For the Christians at Philippi, for example, “in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2 Corinthians 8:2). An abundance of suffering for the believer can always be overbalanced by God’s abounding grace. “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:5). Our God of all grace “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20). HMM

Monday, April 29

Specific Creation

“All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.” (1 Corinthians 15:39)

The doctrine of special creation means that creation took place by supernatural processes and that each created entity was specifically planned and formed by God. This doctrine is clearly taught in the Genesis record, where the phrase “after his kind” is used no less than 10 times in the very first chapter.

One such remarkable reference is found here in 1 Corinthians 15:37-44. The distinctiveness of several major realms of creation is set forth as follows:

Botanical: “God giveth...to every seed his own body” (v. 38).

Zoological: “All flesh is not the same flesh” (our text).

Physical: “There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another” (v. 40). Thus, although all celestial bodies may be made of the same basic chemical elements, planet Earth is unique in its complexity and purpose.

Astral: “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory” (v. 41). Even among the celestial bodies, each star is unique.

Spiritual: “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (v. 44). The Scriptures indicate that although they are genuinely *physical* bodies, they will one day be *supernatural* bodies, not controlled by the present force systems of nature.

God has a noble purpose for each created system, and He has specially designed each for that purpose. Although He has made ample provision for “horizontal” changes within the system, never can one evolve “vertically” into a more complex system. HMM

Tuesday, April 30

Raging Waves

“[They are] raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame.” (Jude 1:13)

Jude connects together a string of 21 illustrations to describe the character of ungodly men who are attacking “the faith once delivered to the saints” (v. 3). This very poignant letter literally sizzles with scathing imagery for those who dare to stir up dissension and disobedience among God’s people.

The particular image in verse 13 is of roiling billows surging ashore after a storm, spitting out “shame” from amidst the foam. The physical picture is disgusting enough. As the energy of the storm increases the waves’ height and frequency, the detritus in and on the ocean is picked up and carried along. As the waves rise up toward the shore, they break and the foam begins to collect and then spew out the “shame” previously covered by the depths.

Isaiah’s comparison is most apt: “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isaiah 57:20). The shame cast up by these raging waves is not just filthy but also damaging to those among whom the shame is dumped.

Paul warned the Corinthian church about those who dealt with “hidden things of dishonesty,” were “walking in craftiness,” or were “handling the word of God deceitfully.” In vivid contrast, Paul and his co-laborers openly displayed “the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Like Jude, Paul forecasts only destruction for these kinds of people. They brag “in their shame” and have their minds set on “earthly things” (Philippians 3:19).

“Foaming” at the mouth is frequently connected with demonic oppression in Scripture (Mark 9:17-18; Luke 9:39; etc.). Medically, the symptom is seldom positive. Perhaps Jude is offering a glimpse of the devilish source of such “raging” and raising a further alarm. HMM III

Wednesday, May 1

Waiting

“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:4)

Within a week of His approaching death, Christ sat down with His disciples to talk of the future. He would be leaving, terrible persecution would come, but He would return. Purposefully, no date was given. Their curiosity was no doubt great, but Christ had other charges for them. Instead, Christ focused on other issues, and His instructions apply to us just as surely as to the disciples.

Whether things are going well or not, we must not be misled into a false sense of security. The disciples were looking at the beautiful and serene temple and grounds, but Christ predicted unprecedented destruction. “There shall not be left one stone upon another” (v. 2).

Nor should we allow ourselves to be deceived by false prophets (vv. 5-6). Scripture gives ample information to allow us to identify and shun these “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” But to our shame, false teachings permeate our churches and television airwaves.

Furthermore, when natural calamities and world turmoil cascade in on us (vv. 7-8), we must not be frozen with fear. These things must come (v. 7). Persecution must come also (vv. 9-12). We must not allow ourselves to be intimidated in our witness or tripped up by bitterness.

Instead, we must “endure” and remain loyal to Him (v. 13). We must be at work to spread the gospel to all nations (v. 10) in spite of the opposition. And, “take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (v. 33).

As the events in the Middle East escalate and take on a character that could lead to the sort of conflagration Jesus prophesied, let us commit ourselves to the attitude of heart and life He commanded. JDM

Wandering Stars

“[They are] wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” (Jude 1:13)

This short reference is somewhat enigmatic. The five “wandering stars” of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were clearly known in Jude’s day, and their behavior had been plotted for many centuries. The Bible also uses “stars” as figures of speech for angelic beings in Job and Revelation.

It is clear in context that Jude is referencing ungodly people, most likely influential leaders in the churches who are damaging and defiling the work of the kingdom. The particular focus of this example is that they are “reserved” for a “blackness of darkness for ever.”

Earlier, Jude cited “the angels which kept not their first estate” as being “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (v. 6). Peter alludes to the same punishment of “angels that sinned” who were delivered “into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Peter 2:4).

But it does not appear that Jude is speaking of angels in today’s text. Beginning in verse 8, Jude begins to tie his illustrations to people—leaders who are misusing their role and privileges for evil rather than good. All of the previous examples are obvious: filthy dreamers, natural beasts, those behaving like Cain, Balaam, or Korah—even the waterless clouds, fruitless trees, and foaming waves are easily compared to human behavior.

How do we apply this illustration? Since the Creator made all things, His revealed Word often provides insight about the true nature of the universe long before we discover it. Comets were observed in Old Testament times. Today we know that they “wander” for some time but eventually dissipate into “the blackness of darkness for ever.” Just so, these “stars” may wow some for a season, but they are reserved for an eternity in hell. HMM III

Friday, May 3

Redeeming the Time

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16)

This incisive expression—“redeeming the time”—occurs also in Colossians 4:5: “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” The Greek word for “redeem” means to “buy back,” to “ransom,” or even to “rescue.” That is, time is a very valuable asset in danger of being lost forever unless it is rescued or redeemed.

As a matter of fact, time is just about the most valuable asset we have. If we squander our money or lose our health, there is always the possibility of earning more money or being restored to health, but wasted time is gone forever. In our text, those who are wise redeem the time, whereas those who are fools waste or misuse it. The word in the original for “circumspectly” is translated “diligently” in Matthew 2:7. The text thus indicates that those who redeem the time are walking diligently; the parallel passage in Colossians 4:5 says they are walking in wisdom. The time God gives us, therefore, should be used both carefully and diligently.

The marvelous passage in the 139th Psalm that describes the growth of the human embryo concludes with a remarkable declaration: “In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalm 139:16). The words “my members” are not in the original, and “in continuance” is actually the Hebrew word for “days.” Thus, the verse is really telling us that all of our days were written in God’s book even before we were conceived. Each day of our lives is vitally important in the plan of God.

“So,” as Moses prayed to the Lord, “teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). HMM

Saturday, May 4

Enoch and the Second Coming

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.” (Jude 1:14)

There are two Enochs in the First Age of the world. One is a son of Cain (Genesis 4:17), and the other is a seventh-generation descendant of Adam through his son Seth (Genesis 5). Jude makes very clear which one he means. Luke references Enoch in his genealogy of the Lord Jesus (Luke 3:37), also indicating that this Enoch is important to remember.

Enoch was the father of Methuselah, who was the grandfather of Noah. Although the Bible does not mention it, several of the early church scholars allude to a Book of Enoch and cite passages from it about the awful days before the world was destroyed by the great Flood.

Perhaps the most startling fact recorded about Enoch is that he “was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). There is not much biblical data to study about Enoch. The Genesis record simply notes, “And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Genesis 5:23-24).

Enoch’s “walk with God” and the lifestyle that “pleased God” are the apparent motives for Jude’s short reference. Jude announces (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) that Enoch preached about the second coming of Christ! That is remarkable. Before the Bible was written, before the first world was destroyed for its universal evil, before the promise of “the seed” to Abraham and the centuries of God’s preparation for the Messiah, Enoch was proclaiming that Jesus would come—again! HMM III

Sunday, May 5

Confession and Forgiveness

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)

Every person, even the most godly Christian believer, at least occasionally commits acts of sin—sins of omission, if not sins of commission. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

When a Christian does sin, the remedy is available. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). This forgiveness is based on the fact that “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The problem is that the very compulsion that caused the believer to commit the sin in the first place will often lead him to try to justify the sin. If that is not possible, he will try to hide it or even to deny it.

The antidote for this situation, of course, is to confess and forsake his sin(s). This confession, however, cannot be simply a generalized confession (“please forgive all my sins”) but a specific “naming” of the particular sins, acknowledging that it was, indeed, a sin in the sight of God, deserving of divine punishment and repudiation by a holy God. Similarly, the term “forsaketh” does not mean simply to quit engaging in the particular sin, but to quit even thinking about it—no longer either desiring the sin or being depressed under the guilt of it. If possible and applicable, this would also entail making restitution to anyone who had been injured by that sin; otherwise, the confession need be made only to God.

And God will forgive and cleanse. Then, “forgetting those things which are behind,” we can “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” (Psalm 32:1). HMM

Monday, May 6

Judging Others

“Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (Matthew 7:1)

This is a very familiar maxim, often cited by unbelievers and carnal Christians as a rebuke to Christians they regard as intolerant. These words of the Lord Jesus Christ do, indeed, warn us against a self-righteous attitude, condemning others who disagree with us on the basis of superficial criteria.

On the other hand, this caution by no means relieves us of the responsibility of evaluating the beliefs and practices of others in the light of Scripture. In the very same sermon, in fact, Jesus said just a few moments later: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine”; and “beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:6-15). Obedience to such commandments obviously requires one to make a judgment as to whether certain unbelievers should be regarded as “dogs” or “swine,” to whom it would be counterproductive to try to speak of spiritual matters, or whether certain professing Christian leaders are actually false prophets who should be repudiated. Jesus also said: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge *righteous* judgment” (John 7:24).

Since the Scriptures themselves are to be used in the final judgment (John 12:48; Revelation 20:12; etc.), it is obvious that we should use them right now to discern truth and error, right and wrong. “For the word of God...is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

There is another basis of judgment that the Lord Jesus has authorized us to use. “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:18-20). Thus, the test of Scripture plus fruit produced can serve as the basis of a valid judgment. Until adequate data for making such a test are available, *judge not!* HMM

Tuesday, May 7

Christ Will Come Again

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:2-3)

The world has not seen the last of Jesus Christ! He was in the world once, but the world would not have Him, even though He had created it (John 1:10). While He was on Earth, He made it clear that He would be returning some day to judge the world.

But here in the upper room, just before His arrest and crucifixion, He told His disciples, for the very first time, that He would be coming for them personally, not to judge them with the world but to “receive you unto myself.” In the first epistle written by the apostle Paul, this wonderful promise was repeated and amplified: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven...and 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).

When He comes again, we shall be where He is forever! In the meantime, the “dead in Christ” are already with Him. At that time, “we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye....For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

During this present time, He is preparing a place for us in the New Jerusalem that, like Christ Himself, will be “coming down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2). All of this is exactly what we might expect from such a gracious and loving Savior, and He assures us that “if it were not so, I would have told you.” HMM

Wednesday, May 8

Ungodly Deeds and Hard Speeches

“...to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” (Jude 1:15)

Jude is referencing the preaching of pre-Flood Enoch, who warned about God’s coming judgment when the Lord returns “with ten thousands of his saints” (v. 14). Jude identifies two ungodly traits that bring about this judgment.

First, there are ungodly deeds that were committed in an ungodly way. Perhaps the best commentary on this deep sin is the Lord Jesus’ description of the unbelief of those who reject the gospel of salvation: “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). Their actions were not mere misdeeds; these deeds were committed with full knowledge of the “light”—and their perpetrators consciously ran away from that light to hide in the “darkness.”

Then there are hard speeches that have been spoken by ungodly sinners against the Lord Jesus. Perhaps these fierce words were uttered as diatribes against the authority of Christ to judge. Peter alludes to these kinds of sinners as “scorners, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:3-4). Paul comments that these kinds of people “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:25).

And that appears to coincide with the nature of the word “ungodly.” All three forms that appear in Jude 1:15 are negative forms of the word for worship. The “un” part of the word stresses the lack of honor and deference that are due the Creator of the universe. These ungodly sinners will be condemned by their own deeds and fierce words. HMM III

Thursday, May 9

Sitting at the Right Hand of God

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Psalm 110:1)

The 110th Psalm is one of the most significant of the so-called Messianic Psalms, prophesying of Christ a thousand years before He came. Its very first verse should completely settle the question as to whether or not the Old Testament teaches that there is only one Person in the Godhead since it recounts an actual conversation between at least two Persons of the Godhead. This first verse is quoted, in whole or in part, at least five times in the New Testament and was even used by Christ Himself (Matthew 22:41-46) to prove His own deity.

Two of the Hebrew names for God are used: “*Jehovah* said unto *Adonai*...” The name *Jehovah* is used again in verses 2-4, and *Adonai* in verse 5. God, in the person of *Adonai*, has gone to Earth on a divine mission to save His people but has been repudiated by His enemies on Earth. Accordingly, God, in the person of *Jehovah*, invites Him back to heaven for a time, where He will be at His right hand until it is time for Him to return to Earth to rule, striking through all opposing “kings in the day of his wrath” (v. 5).

In this coming “day of thy power” (v. 3), “thy people shall be willing.” The word here is actually the word for “free will offerings.” They will be as priests offering their own lives to Him as freewill offerings when they finally recognize Him as their Messiah/King and eternal High Priest (v. 4).

Now, although this prophecy applies specifically to the second coming and the future conversion of Israel, there is a beautiful secondary application used in Scripture for His people right now. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). “Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1). HMM

Two Imperatives

*“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”
(John 3:7)*

The term “born again” has come into such common use in recent years, even in political campaigns, that its tremendous meaning has been all but lost. But Jesus—who ought to know, being none other than God incarnate—said, “Ye must be born again”! Furthermore, He said it to Nicodemus, one of the most religiously knowledgeable people of that day.

He did not say to Nicodemus that “*they* must be born again,” meaning the unbelieving multitudes who were not as instructed in the things of God as they should be. Nor did He say that “*we* must be born again,” meaning all of us mortals including Himself. Rather, Jesus said, “Ye must be born again”!

Even a man like Nicodemus must be born spiritually—born again (literally, “born from above”)—if he were ever to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). In answer to his question as to how this could be, Jesus said he must be born of the Spirit, supernaturally. But Nicodemus—as well as each of us—was born a sinner and was still a sinner, even failing to recognize Christ as Son of man and Son of God. How could he be born again? The answer is in a second imperative: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). If “ye must be born again,” then “even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” Christ must die for our sins before it can ever be possible that a lost sinner be born again. Since Jesus Christ was lifted up on the cross to die for us, our burden of sin has also been lifted up and placed on Him. If we would enter God’s kingdom, we must be born again through faith in Him! There is no other way! HMM

Saturday, May 11

How to Take a Stand for God

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” (Daniel 1:8)

There inevitably come those times in the life of a Christian when he, for conscience sake in the light of the Word of God, must take a stand against some worldly practice. Daniel has given us a striking example of how to do this, not only courageously, but graciously and effectively.

As one of “the princes” of Israel, “of the king’s seed” (Daniel 1:3), he realized that he had the responsibility of maintaining a godly standard as a testimony for the true God when he was asked “to stand in the king’s palace” (Daniel 1:4) after he and his friends had been carried into captivity. Daniel knew that the king’s wine would surely be harmful were he to partake of it. Also, the king’s meat would certainly include pork and would be cooked with blood, which would be unlawful for him, as a good Jew, to eat (Leviticus 11:7-8; 17:10-14). He determined in his heart to take a stand against it.

Note, however, his stand was not belligerent or self-righteous but courteous and reasonable. He requested, “Prove thy servants, I beseech thee” (Daniel 1:8-12). The Babylonians thought they were doing him and his friends a great favor, and Daniel appreciated this. He suggested a scientific test: let them try a vegetarian diet and water for just 10 days to see if this wouldn’t produce better results than the gourmet fare of the palace.

God honored Daniel’s graciousness as well as his courageous faithfulness and so will He do for us. Both are essential ingredients of a fruitful Christian testimony in a non-Christian world. We must “be ready always to give an answer,” but this should be done, not in arrogance, but “with meekness” (1 Peter 3:15). HMM

Sunday, May 12

She Shall Be Praised

“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.” (Proverbs 31:30)

Proverbs 31 is identified as “the words of King Lemuel” (v. 1). Since it is divided into two distinct parts, some have proposed that it has two different authors. The first part (vv. 1-9) consists of “the prophecy that his mother taught him” (v. 1), while the second part (vv. 10-31) describes “a virtuous woman” (v. 10). Perhaps it is better to understand the woman as Lemuel’s mother, for “her children rise up and call her blessed” (v. 28).

“Many daughters have done virtuously” (v. 29, same word as in v. 10). Recognizing that the only other woman described as “virtuous” in the Bible was Ruth (Ruth 3:11) gives us more complete insight into such a woman’s character. The woman described in Proverbs 31 is one who has achieved in all its fullness the glories of her womanhood, both in the home as wife and mother and in her community. Not only do her children bless her, but her husband has absolute confidence in her (v. 11), appreciates the bounty that she brings (v. 12), has the freedom to be an effective leader in the community (v. 23), and praises her virtue to others (v. 28).

Without question, the key to her accomplishments is found in our text. Her fear of the Lord blossoms into such inner beauty and diligence that, by wisdom and devotion, she so trains her children and so lovingly provides for her husband’s needs that when they leave the home she has fashioned and have occasion to speak of her, their words will be blessing and praise.

On this day when so many of us remember and are thankful for our godly wives and/or mothers, let us rekindle our own fear of the Lord and by so doing develop similar qualities and habits. JDM

Monday, May 13

Murmurers and Complainers

“These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage.”
(Jude 1:16)

Jude’s book cites several incidents in the early history of Israel right after they were wonderfully delivered from slavery in Egypt. Within a very short time, they had come through the Red Sea, had bitter water made sweet, seen water come out of a rock, and been fed with “angels’ food” from heaven. Yet when the 12 spies came back from the land of Canaan that had been promised to them, there was a widespread revolt against God and against Moses’ leadership.

The 10 spies who “murmured” against God “died by the plague before the LORD” (Numbers 14:37). Some who had previously sided with the defeatist words of the spies tried to take matters into their own hands and “presumed to go up” to fight against the Canaanites and were killed or scattered (Numbers 14:44-45).

Much of the history of Israel is marked by various ways of turning away from God. Psalm 81 provides a good summary of how God sees this behavior: “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels” (Psalm 81:10-12).

Jude uses a rather unusual word picture to describe those who use others for their personal advantage. They speak “great swelling words” to gain the association. The Greek word is *hyperogkos*, which conveys something like “beyond weight” or “too heavy.” The words are coming from hearts that are lustful and attempting to manipulate others for their own benefit. It appears that those who “murmur” and “complain” will use “heavy” words to achieve their ends. HMM III

Tuesday, May 14

The Light Brigade

“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (Colossians 1:12-13)

By His grace, we have been snatched from Satan’s darkness and been placed in the kingdom of light. However, we still live in a dark world hostile to the light. We are therefore soldiers of light, but as with any army, we are not to act independently but instead “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3), we must follow the orders of our commander and act in accordance with established guidelines.

The supreme commander in this battle of light versus darkness is none other than God the Father, for “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1).

Perhaps, in this analogy, the field commander can be considered to be none other than Jesus Christ, carrying out the will of the supreme commander. He said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38).

We, of course, are the infantry, the light brigade, as it were. “Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6).

Our marching orders, our objective, and our methods are all found in the war manual, the Bible. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light” (Proverbs 6:23). What more could we ask? JDM

Wednesday, May 15

The Promise

“And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” (2 Peter 3:4)

Has Christ forgotten His promise? After His resurrection, He returned to heaven to wait “until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21). Ever since the primeval promise in Eden (Genesis 3:15), God’s inspired prophets have kept assuring His people that He would come as Savior of the world and again as everlasting King, removing the curse of sin and death and bringing in everlasting life and righteousness.

But the centuries have come and gone, age after age, and the world continues to decay, growing worse and worse. With global pollution, disease pandemics, ever-increasing crime, and countless other intractable problems, there may be nothing left if He doesn’t come soon!

Has He forgotten His promise? No! says Peter, in this very same chapter. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

He has not yet returned because there are not yet enough who have “come to repentance”—that is, whose minds and hearts have turned away from the world system and have been renewed through faith in Christ as Creator, Savior, and Lord of all. We need not despair but simply “account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter 3:15), seeking to lead people to Him until He comes.

His promise is sure, and one day He will return indeed! Therefore, Peter concludes, “we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). HMM

Thursday, May 16

The Lord Our Maker

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.” (Psalm 95:6)

Psalms 95–100 seem to form a unit with several common themes running through them, all involving praise to the Lord.

One of these major themes is the recognition of the Lord as Maker of heaven and Earth. For example, consider Psalm 95:5: “The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land.” Thus, God made the earth, including both land and sea. But He also made the heavens! “For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens” (Psalm 96:5).

Higher and far more complex than any planet of the solar system or any star in the heavens are the living organisms found only on planet Earth—especially human beings—and He made these, too. “Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:3).

It is significant that these verses all emphasize the activities of God as Maker rather than as Creator. In the first chapter of Genesis, both types of activity are stressed, the account finally concluding with the summary: “All his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:3).

The two types of work are almost synonymous when referring to the divine activity, but not quite (otherwise “created and made” would be redundant). Specifically, the three acts of true creation in Genesis are the creation of the physical elements of the cosmos, the entity of biological life, and the spiritual image of God in man (Genesis 1:1, 21, 27). These entities God simply called into being *ex nihilo* by His omnipotent Word.

Everything else He made, or formed or let be, out of the three basic entities that were specially created. He is both Creator and Maker of all things, and we should worship Him as such. HMM

Friday, May 17

Running to Christ

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” (Proverbs 18:10)

When one realizes that he is lost and that only Christ can save him, he should not delay a moment but come immediately to Christ. There are, in fact, several men in the New Testament who actually *ran* to Him.

There was the man possessed with a whole legion of demons. “But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him” (Mark 5:6), and Jesus set him free.

Then there was a young man who wanted to learn of Christ. When he found that Jesus was going away, he came “running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17). Unfortunately, his sincerity failed when he realized the cost. Zeal without sacrifice is dead, as is faith without works.

There was another wealthy man who was willing to pay the price. “And [Zacchaeus] ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way” (Luke 19:4). The conversion of Zacchaeus was genuine, and he demonstrated it by a changed and sacrificial life.

In Christ’s suffering on the cross, He spoke of His awful thirst, and an unknown observer “ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink” (Mark 15:36). Christ will not forget this expression of concern and sympathy.

After His burial, Mary Magdalene came back to tell Peter and John that the tomb was open. “So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre....and he saw, and believed” (John 20:4-8).

All who hasten wholeheartedly to Christ, sincerely seeking to know and serve Him, will find salvation in His name, for “the name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” HMM

Saturday, May 18

The Way and the Glory

“Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.”
(Exodus 33:13)

“Moses the man of God” (Deuteronomy 33:1) was surely one of the greatest men who ever lived. He was the leader of a great nation, he received the tablets of the law from God, and he compiled and wrote the Pentateuch. It was said that “there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10). Yet, “the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

It was such a man as this who made two remarkable requests of God. The first was, as above: “Shew me now thy way.” The second, just a moment later, was: “Shew me thy glory” (Exodus 33:18).

These were not selfish requests. Moses desired the way of the Lord on behalf of his people. God answered this request with the gracious promise: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (Exodus 33:14).

But then he also asked to see the glory of God. So God placed Moses “in a cleft of the rock,” covering him with His hand as His glory passed by, allowing him to see the remnants of His glory, as it were (Exodus 33:22-23), since he could not have endured any more. With such a vision of God’s glory, Moses was then able to lead the Israelite multitude for 40 years in a terrible wilderness, transforming them from a mob of slaves into God’s chosen nation, ready to bring God’s Word, and God’s Son, into the world.

We also can see His way and His glory. Jesus said: “I am the way” (John 14:6). Then He prayed: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (John 17:24). HMM

Sunday, May 19

Separate and Sensual

“But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.” (Jude 1:17-19)

Jude had previous contact with the apostle Peter and was aware of Peter’s observation “that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts” (2 Peter 3:3). Peter describes the lusts of these scoffers by pointing out that their derision is focused on the second coming of our Lord Jesus—they deny the very possibility of the creation itself and, therefore, the omnipotent and omniscient authority of God Himself (2 Peter 3:4-6).

Jude, however, focuses on the core character of these mockers, noting that they “separate themselves” and are “sensual.” They are “soulish” (the Greek word is the adjective form of the noun for soul). That is, these kinds of people are driven by their “natural man” and cannot receive “the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:14). James is even more intense: these people are “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15).

Furthermore, they consciously separate themselves from the godly. The apostle John speaks to this phenomenon: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19). Jesus simply notes that “every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:20).

It is therefore an absolute—these people do not have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8:9). HMM III

Monday, May 20

Love in Action

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” (1 Corinthians 13:4)

It is well known that “charity” in this famous “love chapter” is the Greek *agape*, which is translated “love” three times as often as it is translated “charity,” even in the King James Version. Why then did the scholarly translators prefer to use “charity” in this chapter, of all places?

Possibly it is because 1 Corinthians 13 emphasizes what love does rather than what love *is*. Love is described in this chapter, not with adjectives or adverbs, but with verbs! “Charity,” in the Old English sense, was not merely giving to feed the poor (note v. 3) but meant *agape* love—an unselfish, enduring, and active concern on behalf of others.

In this passage (vv. 4-8, 13) are listed 17 actions that love, or charity, *does* or *does not* engage in. Love acts with patience and kindness; it does not envy others or seek to impress others, neither does it exhibit arrogance or conceit. Love is never rude, does not seek its own way, is slow to take offense, and bears no malice or resentment. Love does not gloat over the sins of others and is delighted when truth prevails. Love will bear up under any trial and will never lose faith; it is always hopeful and unlimited in its endurance.

Finally, genuine love will be eternal. Even faith will cease when it is replaced by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), and hope will finally be fulfilled (Romans 8:24), but love will abide forever. Love, of course, is eternal because Christ is eternal, and Christ is God, and God is love.

This classic passage, describing genuine Christian love, could in fact be read as a beautiful description of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. That is, “Christ suffereth long, and is kind,” and so on, finally climaxing in the great truth, “Christ never faileth.” Jesus Christ is, indeed, love in action! HMM

Tuesday, May 21

A Soon Departure

“Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.” (2 Peter 1:14)

Peter was writing to the scattered believers, persecuted from without and badgered from within by false teachers. He wrote to “put [them] always in remembrance of these things” that they had been taught, so that they would “be established in the present truth” (v. 12). As he wrote, he viewed his impending “decease” (v. 15, literally, “exodus”) as merely putting off his earthly tent and putting on another as one would change clothes (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). But this would, perhaps, be his last opportunity to strengthen the lives of the believers.

Once before, Peter had faced the prospect of death. The church was under attack (Acts 12:1). Of the three who had been in Jesus’ “inner circle,” James had been killed (v. 2), and Peter had been imprisoned and was under heavy guard (vv. 3-6). However, an angel of the Lord (v. 7) escorted him out of prison and out of harm’s way (vv. 8-10). We can only surmise the full impact this made on Peter and his ministry, but we do know he was not afraid to die for his Lord.

Actually, as mentioned in our text, the resurrected Lord Himself had predicted Peter’s brutal death at the hands of the enemy (John 21:19). Tradition has it that Peter was crucified upside down during the persecution of the church at the hands of Nero, no doubt glorifying God in and through his death.

But his main concerns in this passage were the believers to whom he wrote. He even revealed that he had a plan to “have these things always in remembrance” (2 Peter 1:15). This would be through his diligent teaching, through his letters, and evidently also through the ministry of his own disciple, Mark (1 Peter 5:13), who would carry on after his death.

May God grant each of us a similarly fearless, fruitful, and lasting ministry. JDM

Wednesday, May 22

Build Yourself Up

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” (Jude 1:20-21)

The New Testament relationship of the twice-born to the eternal condition is compared to a “building” of God (Ephesians 2:22) made up of “lively stones” (1 Peter 2:5). Thus, there is often the exhortation for us to build a holy association with each other (Romans 14:19) and to seek to build a strong assembly as we work together (Ephesians 4:16).

Each of the many references uses some combination of descriptive preposition or adjective along with the term for house. The general application assumes that since we will be “housed” together in eternity, we should seek to be building that house while on Earth. Even those who are in authority in the “house of God” (1 Timothy 3:15) are to be focused on building that house (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Jude addresses the individual. He presumes we are aware that we are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” with “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20). Even with a “wise masterbuilder” like Paul to give us inspired instructions (1 Corinthians 3:10), we need to be very careful how we build on the foundation that Jesus Christ has laid for us. Our work can be “gold, silver, and precious stones, wood, hay, [or] stubble,” and it will be evaluated by the “fire” of God’s timeless judgment (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

The construction of the building—both the larger house and the individual “lively stones” that make up the house—are to be built up on the “most holy faith.” Once the foundation has been laid by Jesus Christ, we are to be “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:7). HMM III

Thursday, May 23

Sit Still

“Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.” (Ruth 3:18)

This was the instruction given to Ruth by Naomi in hopes that her kinsman, Boaz, would be willing to perform his family duty and marry Ruth, whose Jewish husband had died in Moab. Ruth’s behavior had been honorable, and she had done what she could to let Boaz know she was willing to be his wife, but now she could do nothing except to sit still and wait.

This lesson needs to be remembered by Christians today. All too often we rush ahead of the Lord, fearful that things won’t work out unless we take matters into our own hands. When the Jews were being invaded by the Assyrian armies and felt they needed an alliance with Pharaoh, God warned: “The Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still.... In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:7-15).

Long before, when the children of Israel were in even more desperate circumstances with the Egyptian armies pursuing them and the Red Sea in front of them, Moses had said: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13). Soon, Pharaoh’s chariots were at the bottom of the sea just as, in due time, Boaz did marry Ruth, and 600 years later, the hosts of the Assyrians were slain by the angel of the Lord (Isaiah 37:36).

There is, certainly, a time to work—and work hard—in the service of the Lord. There are spiritual battles to be fought and races to be run. But when we have done the best we know how, according to the Scriptures, and still don’t see the answer, there comes a time when we must simply sit still and wait for the Lord. He would have us “be still, and know that [He is] God” (Psalm 46:10). HMM

Evidence of the Spirit's Filling

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)

This classic verse on the filling of the Holy Spirit can be rendered as follows: “And don’t begin to be drunk with wine, which involves profligacy, but be continually being filled with the Spirit.” That is, one cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit (which implies complete control by the Holy Spirit) if he has come to even the slightest degree under the control of wine (or anything else, for that matter).

Being fully controlled and guided by the Spirit is not just a one-time experience. It should be a continual experience—a moment-by-moment control of one’s thoughts and actions by God. In practice, however, it is at best a repeated experience, whereas most Christians experience it quite rarely, if at all.

But how does one have such an experience, and what is the evidence that it is the real thing? To be controlled by the Spirit, one must yield control to Him and not let himself be controlled by anything or anyone else. In practice, this means believing and obeying the Word He inspired, consciously yielding one’s self as often as necessary. Jesus promised that “when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

It *should* be noted that the filling of the Spirit is not necessarily marked by any particular feeling or ecstatic experience. The real proof is in the life, manifested by such characteristics as are described in the context of the passages referring to the Spirit’s filling. In our text, it is obvious that such a filling is accompanied by redeeming one’s time (v. 16), understanding God’s will (v. 17), a happy and Bible-centered conversation (v. 19), a continuously thankful heart (v. 20), and a right attitude and relationship with one’s spouse (vv. 22-25). It is also evidenced by boldness in witnessing and in standing up for God’s truth (Acts 4:31; 13:9-10). HMM

Saturday, May 25

Elijah's Prayer

“Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” (James 5:17-18)

“Elias” is the New Testament name for Elijah, the great prophet who lived during the darkest days of Israel’s apostasy, when Ahab and Jezebel ruled the land and had turned it over to the worship of the demonic god Baal. “Elijah” means “*Jehovah* is God,” a most appropriate name for a prophet of the true God in a nation and time given over to paganism.

Elijah suddenly appeared before King Ahab with the ominous prophecy: “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). This was not presumptuous. In his commentary, James said Elijah “prayed earnestly” before he spoke and that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

This remarkable prophecy was miraculously fulfilled. There was no rain in all the land of Israel for 3.5 years (as also confirmed by Christ in Luke 4:25) until Elijah defeated all the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:17-45).

Yet, James reminds us that Elijah was “a man of like passions as we” and that both ends of the miracle—the onset and termination of the nationwide drought—were simply answers to Elijah’s two fervent prayers. James has much to say about how we also can receive wonderful answers to prayer. In addition to praying fervently, we must “ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:6). But faith must be expressed by action (as when Elijah confronted Ahab), for “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). Finally, if we “ask, and receive not,” it may be that we “ask amiss,” wanting the answer only for ourselves (James 4:3). HMM

Sunday, May 26

What God 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, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

This sounds simple enough, and the people of Israel readily agreed with Moses to do these things. Modern religious liberals cite such a lifestyle as all that is necessary to satisfy God. But the rub is this: Who dares claim to “walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD [his] God with all [his] heart”? Anyone who makes such a claim would be breaking God’s commandment against lying.

Solomon reached a conclusion of like kind: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Indeed so, but who can “keep his commandments”? “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

Another favorite verse of the liberals is Micah 6:8: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Yes, but the problem is that “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

There was one such man, of course! The Lord Jesus Christ “did no sin,” yet was willing to “bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness” (1 Peter 2:22-24). What we could never do, He has done for us. Now, through faith in the finished work of Christ, we have been set free from the bondage of sin and can indeed “have [our] fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Romans 6:22). HMM

Monday, May 27

What Mean These Stones

“When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know.” (Joshua 4:21-22)

The poet George Santayana once said, “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” In the life of every nation, there are “memories” that must be preserved if that nation is to retain an awareness of its unique role among the nations of the world—indeed, among the long list of nations throughout history.

Long ago, God Himself instituted “memorials” so that the key events of history might be remembered. The rainbow was to remind God of His covenant to preserve life on the earth after the awful destruction of the Flood (Genesis 9:8-17). Jacob set up a stone after he had seen the ladder and spoken with the angel of the Lord (Genesis 28:12-22). Joseph insisted that the children of Israel take his bones with them into the land of promise (Genesis 50:25).

In our text, Joshua is told by the Lord to take 12 stones out of the Jordan and make a monument to commemorate the beginning fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham centuries earlier. That day, Israel was to enter the “promised land” and start its conquest of Canaan.

The Memorial Day that we celebrate in the United States began with the ending of the Civil War. Since then, our country has added many memorials. Each of them, whether a mere plaque, a lone statue to a notable person, or a vast and sweeping edifice, are all intended to remember some significant event and the people who made history during that time. Typically, we honor the dead who paid the ultimate price that we might live on—and we should. There are others, though, whose sacrifices in time and treasure were enormous. May our thanks this day “remember” all of them. HMM III

Tuesday, May 28

Every Creature Under Heaven

“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.” (Colossians 1:23)

Before the Lord ascended back to heaven, He commanded His disciples to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and one might receive the impression from the words of our text that this had already been accomplished, just 30 years after the command was given.

Yet, it is hardly plausible to infer from this that Christian missionaries had already reached the entire globe. The problem may be our far-too-limited appreciation of God’s witness in the creation. The phrase “to every creature” in our text could better be read “in everything created.” That is, the gospel that was now being brought in explicit terms to the Colossians was consistent with what they already should have known from God’s great witness in the very structure and behavior of everything He had created.

This is the testimony of such familiar verses as Psalm 19:1 (“the heavens declare...”); Romans 1:20 (“the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen”); Acts 14:17 (“he left not himself without witness”); and Acts 17:28 (“in him we live, and move, and have our being”). In the verses just preceding our text (Colossians 1:16-22), Paul had defined this universal gospel as embracing the creation, salvation, and consummation of “all things” by Christ (vv. 16-17, 20). The essence of this truth can be seen (if one’s eyes are willing to see it) in “all the world” (v. 6) in the beauty, complexity, unity in diversity, purposefulness, continuance of energy, and process as found in “every creature which is under heaven.” Every aspect of God’s creation has been designed to reveal Christ as Maker and Savior. HMM

Wednesday, May 29

Saving Some

“And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” (Jude 1:22-23)

In the context of this passage, Jude has been exhorting us to “build up” ourselves in the “most holy faith,” keeping ourselves in God’s love and looking forward to “the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:20-21). The instructions that follow may apply to us and our fellow believers. If so, then these categories would fit the “vessels of...dishonour” that Paul alludes to that are in a “great house” (2 Timothy 2:20).

“Of some have compassion, making a difference.” Some of those in our circle of influence need our “pity.” The word choices imply a desperate need that we must attempt to remedy. Many of the Lord’s healing miracles were done because of compassion. We are encouraged to “make a difference” in the lives of those who urgently need the healing of the Word of God.

“Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.” These are in jeopardy of eternal judgment. They are truly needy but are more dangerous to deal with. Even the imagery used by Jude is fearful. These are so “spotted” (dirty, filthy) by their fleshly deeds that we must “beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (2 Peter 3:17).

Jude’s admonition is also applicable to Paul’s concern for the unsaved Jews that he “might save some of them” (Romans 11:14) or his willingness to become as “them that are without law” so that he might “gain them” and to become “as weak, that I might gain the weak” (1 Corinthians 9:21-22). The instructions are valid for either perspective.

Paul echoes Jude’s concern when he says, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). HMM III

Thursday, May 30

The Able One

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

This beautiful benediction is quoted at the end of many worship times because it summarizes both the core promises and the foundational authority of “the only wise God our Saviour.”

He is able! The precision of the Holy Spirit’s inspired words is always perfect. The ability of the only wise God is not only omnipotent but omniscient as well. The Greek word *dunamis* signifies not only sufficient innate power to accomplish the task but also the knowledge to perform the job correctly. The leper said, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Matthew 8:2).

He is able to “keep you from falling.” Again, the word choices are absolutely wonderful. God’s ability is used to provide a place of *safe custody* sufficient to stop any external attack. “But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil” (2 Thessalonians 3:3). That custody protects our “faultlessness”—a condition that is without any flaw. “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4).

Only God’s omnipotence and omniscience can produce a “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). God “can do” nothing less. His *dunamis* is such that “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

That is why “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God” must be given “honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17). HMM III

Friday, May 31

Unsearchable Things

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.” (Proverbs 25:2)

Education is sometimes claimed to be a “search for truth,” and scientists in particular take pride in their “research.” No doubt the scientific method has led to many useful discoveries and inventions, and rulers often have sponsored “government research” for their own ends. Furthermore, God’s primeval “dominion mandate” (Genesis 1:26-28) in effect ordains the conduct of beneficial research.

At the same time, there are some things that are far beyond the research capabilities of human investigations. Yet, they are understandable to the believing heart because these unsearchable things are near to the heart of God, who made us in His image. “I would seek unto God,” Job said, “and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number” (Job 5:8-9).

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3). “There is no searching of his understanding” (Isaiah 40:28). “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5). There is far more to be discovered concerning God and His great creation than all the scientists can ever hope to discover in this life. But those who love Him will have an eternity of time to search out the majestic complexities of His infinite universe, for “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

What a marvelous paradox! “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). Yet unsearchable though they be, Paul, “less than the least of all saints,” was able to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). HMM



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