

Days of Praise



March • April • May 2025

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

March • April • May 2025

*“The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of the singing of birds is come.”
(Song of Solomon 2:12)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

*“The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”
(Luke 24:7)*

Dear Christian friend,

On the third day, the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, just as He said! The above text is a wonderful theme verse for this spring quarter’s devotions. Jesus reigns supreme in every area. What we call “come from behind victories” are no exception. There He was—rejected, beaten, humiliated, crucified, and, some thought, destined for obscurity.

But Jesus triumphed over death and is now at the right hand of the Father. He will return to inherit the kingdoms of Earth and will reign as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16)...all to the Father’s glory.

Thank you for setting aside time daily to meet with us as we think on our perfect Creator and Savior. I pray the Holy Spirit will use these Bible studies to help you fall deeper in love with Lord Jesus and our good heavenly Father.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

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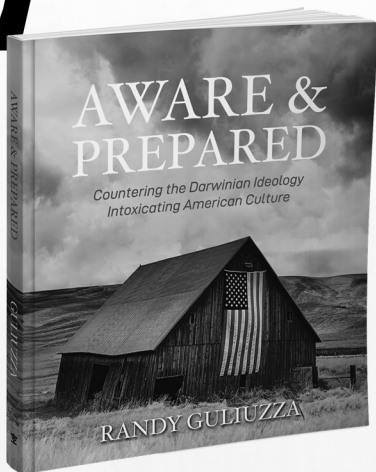
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Saturday, March 1

Shun Babblings

“But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus.” (2 Timothy 2:16-17)

Paul’s earlier warning about “word fights” (2 Timothy 2:14) is strengthened in the text above with a different emphasis. Word fights are “picky” debates started by quarrelsome people. They are useless and divisive. They create conflicts and schisms.

Profane and vain babblings, however, are worldly and valueless “noise.” Less obvious and more subtle than fighting, they have the effect of destroying godliness. “But refuse profane [ungodly] and old wives’ fables [myths, baseless stories], and exercise thyself rather unto godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7).

Because “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8), Paul strongly urged Timothy to “keep [guard] that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

The “oppositions” spoken of are the “antithesis”—the conflict, the stand against knowledge. Paul calls this anti-knowledge a *pseudonumos*—a false name. It sounds like knowledge but is *not* true.

The results of these “babblings” are not good. Ungodliness will increase. Error will eat away at spiritual health and truth like gangrene. The two church leaders that Paul mentions, Hymenaeus and Philetus, are listed as examples of such a cancer. They taught that the resurrection had already occurred for the saints.

Peter’s warning is very similar: “Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (2 Peter 3:17). HMM III

Sunday, March 2

Personal Greetings

“Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.” (Romans 16:14)

An interesting phenomenon occurs in the closing chapter of many of Paul’s epistles, which may at first seem incongruous with the biblical doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration. This phenomenon is the recital of various names of individuals—people in the churches from which, or to which, he was writing. Most of them are people about whom we know nothing except their names as listed by Paul. There are 11 people mentioned by name in Colossians 4:7-17. In Paul’s final epistle to Timothy, right after he had written the great passage on the inspiration of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17), he mentioned no less than 18 names. In the last chapter of Romans is listed 35 names, five of which are included in the one short verse of our text.

The question is, why did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to include so many personal names of people who were of only local interest in epistles that God intended to be used by Christians everywhere? And, of course, these lists of names are dwarfed in comparison to the very extensive lists in the Old Testament (e.g., Numbers 7 and 26).

Perhaps the main reason for their permanent inscription in this fashion is simply to illustrate the great truth that God knows and cares about every one of His children. We do know that each of our names is written in “the book of life of the Lamb” and in God’s “book of remembrance...for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name” (Revelation 13:8; Malachi 3:16). Perhaps as a small token and assurance of these great lists in heaven, God has listed a few of these names in His Book here on Earth. They were ordinary people just like us, and it will be our privilege, as Paul instructs in our text, to “salute Asyncritus” and all the other believers who have gone before us when we can. HMM

Monday, March 3

Let Him Hear

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Revelation 3:22)

This is the final exhortation in Christ’s letters to His seven representative churches. It is the seventh such exhortation, one addressed to each church, so it must be unusually important. The emphasis, obviously, is not merely hearing with the physical ear but hearing with an obedient heart.

First of all, such hearing is necessary for saving faith, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Jesus said, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

In our day, however, probably more than in any previous age, there is a cacophony of voices of all kinds that are seeking listeners. In fact, Jesus Himself cautioned, “Take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24). There are multitudes of false teachers today—evolutionary humanists, religious liberals, “New Age” mystics, and others—all very articulate and often winsome but speaking false doctrine. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

It is important not only to hear the right words but also to hear the right way. Jesus also said, “Take heed therefore how ye hear” (Luke 8:18). Even if we hear the pure Word of God, it will accomplish nothing of value in our lives unless we hear with due reverence. “To this man will I look, even to him that . . . trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). And we must also hear with faith. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2). “He that hath an ear,” therefore, let him hear with reverent faith the true Word of God. HMM

Tuesday, March 4

God My Personal Savior

“And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” (Luke 1:47)

One of the most wonderful titles of the Lord Jesus Christ is that of Savior. This word (Greek *soter*, from which is derived our theological term “soteriology,” the study of salvation) occurs 24 times in the New Testament and is applied only to Christ, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

It occurs first of all on the lips of the virgin Mary in our text above when she realized that she had been chosen to be the mother of the Savior. It is significant that this first use of *soter* recognizes that our Savior can be none other than God Himself—“God my Savior”—and also that this fact should cause our spirits to rejoice, as Mary’s did. He becomes our *personal* Savior when we believe on Him like Mary.

He is also “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14) and the “Saviour of all men” in the sense that His work on the cross is sufficient to save all who will receive Him.

There are eight other verses in the New Testament in which “Savior” is taken as synonymous with “God.” The final occurrence of “Savior” is one of these, and it is in one of the greatest doxologies of the Bible. “To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:25).

There are many today who see the man Jesus as a great teacher and example but reject His deity. There are many others who believe in a cosmic deity of some kind but are unwilling to believe that He could become uniquely incarnate in a perfect man. How urgent it is that we believe and teach that our Creator must also become our Savior if we are ever to be saved. We must “trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” (1 Timothy 4:10). Then we can rejoice with Mary in “God my Saviour.” HMM

Wednesday, March 5

David's Son

“He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.”
(2 Samuel 7:13-14)

These verses comprise the heart of the great Davidic covenant made by God with David and his “seed.” As with many Old Testament prophecies, it had both an immediate and ultimate fulfillment. Initially, it applied to Solomon, who did, indeed, “build an house for my name.”

Its complete fulfillment, however, had to await the distant coming (a thousand years in the future for His first coming) of David's greater Son, the Messiah. It was only of Him that God could promise uniquely that He would also be the Son of the heavenly Father (Hebrews 1:5). To His mother, Mary, the angel Gabriel confirmed the Davidic promise: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32-33).

But before an eternal throne could be established, iniquities must be judged. As far as Solomon was concerned, his iniquities ultimately cut his own seed off from the throne. “The seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3) came through Nathan, not Solomon (Luke 3:23-31).

Although Jesus Christ “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21), “he was bruised for our iniquities,” because “the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” He deserved no chastening; nevertheless, “the chastisement of our peace was upon him” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Thereby the Lord Jesus Christ, “greater than Solomon” (Matthew 12:42), is indeed “a son over his own house; whose house are we” (Hebrews 3:6). HMM

Thursday, March 6

Jesus Wept

“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

This two-word verse is packed with meaning. Jesus hears his close friend Lazarus is quite ill, and Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha, urgently send for Jesus. But Jesus waits two days before journeying to Bethany to see them, and Lazarus dies.

Jesus arrives at the tomb with the grieving sisters. His heart breaks for his friends, and He weeps with them (John 11:35). This is astonishing considering that Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead only moments later.

Why would the Son of God openly weep while knowing He was about to restore Lazarus to life? The answer is clear: Jesus loves us. The depth of His compassion is beyond comprehension. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus, our all-powerful Creator and Redeemer, describes His own character, telling us He is “meek and lowly in heart.”

Jesus’ love for us today is no less than His love for those three siblings. He empathizes with us when we struggle under the burdens of this broken Earth (Hebrews 4:15), and He mourns with us when we grieve.

No doubt Jesus’ resurrection miracle instantly changed Mary’s and Martha’s tears of grief into tears of unspeakably great joy. This miracle was a clear sign of Jesus’ own upcoming resurrection and His absolute power over creation and even death.

On the last day, when we meet Jesus face to face, we will be overcome with joy, and Jesus will enfold us in His arms, the same arms that have held us from the moment of our conception, and welcome us home to the place He’s prepared for us (John 14:3). “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain....Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:4-5). MJS

Friday, March 7

The Duty of Rejoicing

“But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.” (Psalm 5:11)

It may seem strange to think of rejoicing as a Christian duty, but the Scriptures do contain many commands to rejoice, and many of these are given in circumstances of grief or danger, as is the case of today’s beautiful verse.

Paul wrote from a Roman dungeon, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). In the upper room the night before He was to die on a cross, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). And then He said, “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2). But then He said again, “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

If David could rejoice while fleeing from murderous enemies, if Paul could rejoice while chained unjustly in a Roman prison, if the disciples could experience fullness of joy while facing martyrdom, and if the Lord Himself “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2), then our Christian duty of rejoicing in all circumstances may not be such an unseemly command after all.

We can rejoice, as our text reminds us, “because thou defendest them.” Furthermore, He Himself provides the joy, for “the fruit of the Spirit is...joy” (Galatians 5:22). It is not that the Christian will never know sorrow, for Christ Himself was “a man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3). But He also was a man of joy, and *in Him* we can be *like Him*—“as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). HMM

Saturday, March 8

Apostasy and Prosperity

“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)

One of the most tragic movements in Christendom today teaches that God promises to make each Christian prosper in material wealth. Suffice it to say, the Bible teaches no such thing, as seen in our text and elsewhere, but this false teaching is not new and is associated with apostasy.

Consider chapters 17 and 18 of the book of Judges, which describe a period of rampant apostasy and confusion. The chapters provide character sketches of an itinerant Levite, the tribe of Dan, and a man named Micah. First we see that Micah steals 1,100 shekels of silver from his mother, who then places a curse on the unknown thief. Micah, fearing the curse, confesses the crime. His mother tries to lessen the curse by dedicating all the money to the Lord and converts 200 shekels into an idol. Micah places the idol with his others and consecrates his son as a priest, even though they are of the tribe of Ephraim. Later, he hires the Levite to be his priest and exclaims, “Now know I that the LORD will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest” (Judges 17:13).

In the next chapter, spies of the Danites go to the priest for God’s blessing on their efforts to find land that they can conquer. When the marauders return, they recruit the Levite to a more prosperous position. He joins them, having stolen Micah’s idols, and establishes the tribal priesthood.

Each one in this story was confident that God would bless them materially because they had the trappings of religion. The common denominator was greed. Their desire for personal prosperity led them to a prostitution of the true worship of God. But whenever religion is used to justify the love of money, it suffers degradation. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). JDM

Sunday, March 9

Everlasting Love

“The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

Perhaps no doctrine in Scripture is as clearly stated as that expressed in our text and in many other passages. God loves us! His love is an “everlasting love” and compels Him to act strongly and lovingly on our behalf. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). This theme finds glorious expression in a grand hymn from the nineteenth century entitled “I Am His, and He Is Mine.”

*Loved with everlasting love, Led by grace that love to know;
Spirit, breathing from above, Thou hast taught me it is so!
O this full and perfect peace, O this transport all divine—
In a love which cannot cease, I am His and He is mine.*

Jesus prayed, “I in them, and thou in me,...that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” (John 17:23-24). The Father will never allow us to part from Him or our Savior.

These precious facts are taught to us by the “inspired” (literally “God-breathed”) Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16), and “the Comforter...the Spirit of truth [who] will guide [us] into all truth” (John 16:7, 13). He drew us to Himself “in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (Ephesians 1:4-5). “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). In His grace, we come to Him, experiencing sweet forgiveness and everlasting love. Cradled in the security of His undying love, we have peace. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee” (Isaiah 26:3). JDM

Monday, March 10

Appreciating God's Creation

“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” (Genesis 2:8-9)

Everything in the garden of Eden was prepared for man's enjoyment. In the time between creation and the Curse, Adam and Eve no doubt fully enjoyed the vegetation (Genesis 2:5, 9, 15-16), the animals (vv. 19-20), the atmosphere and the weather (vv. 5-6), the rivers and the raw materials (vv. 10-14), each other (vv. 18, 21-25), and fellowship with God (3:8). But soon they rebelled and were driven from the beautiful garden (3:24). Ever since, mankind's ability to enjoy creation has been somewhat shackled, for creation was distorted by sin, and the eyes of each one of us have become dull. The second verse of the well-loved hymn “I Am His, and He Is Mine” describes a partial reopening of the eyes of a believer upon salvation as a love gift from our Lord.

*Heav'n above is softer blue, Earth around is sweeter green;
Something lives in ev'ry hue Christless eyes have never seen!
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow, Flowers with deeper
beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know, I am His and He is mine.*

In His abundant love for His children, our Lord promises to supply all our needs once again. “Why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:28-29). Creation's beauty waits to thrill us and instruct us. Our loving Father wills it so. But creation will be fully restored soon, and “the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing” (Isaiah 35:1-2). He beckons us to join Him in His kingdom. JDM

Tuesday, March 11

His Everlasting Arms

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee.” (Deuteronomy 33:27)

The third verse of “I Am His, and He Is Mine” recalls former times of alarm, fear, and doubt but testifies of the rest and peace in God’s love, cradled in the “everlasting arms” of the Savior.

*Things that once were wild alarms
Cannot now disturb my rest;
Closed in everlasting arms,
Pillowed on the loving breast!
O to lie forever here,
Doubt and care and self resign,
While He whispers in my ear—
I am His and He is mine.*

This verse reminds us of the evening when Jesus and His disciples were in a boat and a violent storm arose. They awoke Jesus from His sleep and cried, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). Of course Jesus cared, for He loved them. So “he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still” (v. 39). To His disciples, He said, “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?” (v. 40). The time would come when they would need that faith and peace. They would learn to rest in His loving care.

The song also reminds us of the special loving relationship between Jesus and the disciple John. “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). A deep intimacy with Him was John’s and can be ours if we will only pillow our head on Him. No passage expresses that intimacy as well as the Song of Solomon, using the analogy of husband and wife to reflect the self-sacrificing love between our Lord and His children. “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine” (Song of Solomon 6:3). The affairs of this life interrupt our times of intimacy with Him, but there will be a day when we will “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). JDM

Wednesday, March 12

While God and I Shall Be

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

The final verse of the majestic hymn “I Am His, and He Is Mine” focuses on the unending love between the believer and God. As we read in our text, nothing can “separate us from the love of God.”

*His forever, only His—Who the Lord and me shall part?
Ah, with what a rest of bliss Christ can fill the loving heart!
Heav’n and earth may fade and flee, First-born light in
gloom decline,
But while God and I shall be, I am His and He is mine.*

Resting in such supernatural love, which lasts forever, begets peace and rest even now. Our Savior beckons, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Aspects of our present life may be temporary, but His love lasts forever. “The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment,...but my salvation shall be forever” (Isaiah 51:6). “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar [gray] hairs will I carry you” (Isaiah 46:4).

Consider the last line in the hymn. “But while God and I shall be, I am His and He is mine.” As long as either God or the individual remains, their love will last. “But the LORD shall endure for ever” (Psalm 9:7). “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Thus, the Christian “will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:6). “I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). JDM

Thursday, March 13

The Beginning of Creation

“But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.” (Mark 10:6)

These words of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to settle once and for all, for those who take His words seriously, the controversial question of the age of the earth. The earth was created essentially at the same time as the creation of Adam and Eve. Christ was quoting from Genesis 1:27: “male and female created He them.” This greatest of God’s creative works was “from the beginning of the creation,” not 13 billion years after the *beginning* of the creation, as modern old-earth advocates allege.

One can understand why atheists believe in evolution and an almost infinitely old universe, for they really have no other alternative. One who believes in a personal God, on the other hand, only dishonors God if he believes such humanistic speculations rather than God’s Word. The great ages assumed by evolutionary geologists supposedly involved billions of years of suffering and dying by billions of animals before man ever evolved. God is omniscient and omnipotent, as well as loving and merciful, and He would never do anything like this. Surely this would have been the most inefficient, wasteful, and cruel method that ever could have been devised for “creating” human beings. Since man’s creation was the pinnacle of God’s creation, there is no conceivable reason why He would waste billions of years in such a meaningless charade as this before getting to the point. In fact, the only reason He took six days instead of an instant of time was to model a pattern for man’s workweek (Exodus 20:8-11).

In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ was not only a creationist but was Himself the Creator of all things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; etc.). Therefore, He is the best possible witness as to *when* He created man and woman, and *He* said it was “from the beginning of the creation”! HMM

Friday, March 14

Cities Set on a Hill

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.” (Matthew 5:14)

Cities in ancient times were often built on a hill, and this was especially important for those six cities in Israel that had been designated as cities of refuge. They were located, geographically, so that no one in Israel was more than a day’s journey from one of them—accessible to all who might need to flee to one for refuge some day. These were designated as havens, “that the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood” (Joshua 20:3).

“And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjatharba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh” (Joshua 20:7-8). The first three cities are specifically said to be on mountains. On the east of Jordan, Ramoth was on Mount Gilead, Golan on the Golan Heights east of the Sea of Galilee, and Bezer apparently on the high tablelands east of the Dead Sea. Thus, all could be seen from a great distance, even at night, by their watch fires. Their strategic locations were a comfort to the accidental killer as he fled for his life from an avenger of blood.

The cities of refuge were a type of Christ, to whom we “have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:18). He is, to us, a strong city set on a hill, ready to receive all who come to Him in faith. He called Himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12), but then He also said that those who now have His light must also serve as lights—as cities on a hill—that those who see them may “glorify [their] Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). HMM

Saturday, March 15

In Time of Trouble

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

In this psalm of praise, David expresses his confidence in the Lord, even though “the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh” (v. 2). In spite of the danger, he looks to God for safety. “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (v. 1). Why did God preserve David? The answer is at least twofold.

First, David had a heart for God. “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (v. 4). “Thy face, LORD, will I seek” (v. 8). “Teach me thy way, O LORD” (v. 11).

The second reason is the nature of God Himself. God, by His very nature, hates evil and extends grace toward His own. He is pictured here as a warrior conquering the evil enemies of David. His laws forbid their actions; His gospel robbed these evildoers of their grip; His final kingdom will be rid of them. Until God’s justice, His gospel, and His purpose all fail, we can be sure that He will act.

In our text, David is hidden in the Lord’s “pavilion.” The word, which literally means a protective covering, was used for the tent of the commander-in-chief. Here, with the commander-in-chief, is the most fortified, guarded, and safe area of the battleground. If the pavilion falls, the battle is lost and God has failed. Hidden in His pavilion, we are as safe as He. He sees to it that we are not frightened amid the din of battle (v. 13), and we shall share in the ultimate victory.

In this world, we have tumultuous war; in the next, unbroken peace. Assured of the outcome, we can “wait on the LORD: [and] be of good courage” (v. 14). JDM

Glorious Holiness

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

Our finite minds would never grasp the idea of holiness if not for the revelation granted to us in the Scriptures. God’s “separateness” requires even the awesome four-faced, six-winged seraphim to “rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8).

Samuel’s gentle mother, praying before the tabernacle, was no doubt moved by the Spirit of God to proclaim, “There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee” (1 Samuel 2:2). Her short statement of faith is the core of holiness—the separate unique character that only the Creator of the universe can possess.

Those who have been “born again” (John 3:3) are called “saints” (Romans 1:7) when they were “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Our “holiness” is part of the “gift of God” from the One who is holy, “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Because our Creator, Lord, and King is “righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psalm 145:17), it should come as no surprise that “as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16).

The “great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4) given to us by our gracious Lord are the spiritual means by which we can “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). Our destiny is sure. Our duty is clear. “Yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength” (Isaiah 49:5). HMM III

Monday, March 17

Three Mindsets for Joy

“And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.”
(Philippians 1:25)

Bible expositors often call Philippians “the joy book.” In it, Paul mentions “joy” or “rejoice” 14 times—all while he was imprisoned! Paul certainly found his source of joy from way outside his circumstances. He also mentioned “mind” seven times. This might suggest that the key to joy lies in how we choose to think. The epistle offers three key mindsets that should bring believers joy.

The first mindset is unity. “Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). In particular, our mindset should unify around the gospel—the good news that a holy God saves vile sinners who repent and trust His only Son Jesus, the resurrected One.

The second mindset that sets us up for joy is humility. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” who “took upon him the form of a servant” and “humbled himself” (Philippians 2:5, 7-8). For how can we lose joy when we’ve already dropped our desire to have things our way? Instead, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (v. 3).

The last mindset is to “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). When we sever ties with the things of this world—whether bank accounts, the praises of men, or entitlement to happiness—then we clear enough clutter from our minds that simply knowing the Lord takes over. Unity in the gospel, humility in service, and detachment from worldly things bring peace that “surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). BDT

Tuesday, March 18

The Poetry of God

“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)

The word “poem” is derived from the Greek *poiema*. Used only twice in the New Testament, it refers to two great works of God Himself. Thus, God is the divine poet who has created two great masterpieces—artistic creations of marvelous intricacy and surpassing beauty.

The first is the entire physical universe: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). In this key verse, *poiema* is translated “things that are made.” Everything in the universe, animate and inanimate, constitutes a marvelous product of God’s creative forethought and inventive skill. If a beautiful poem requires a poet to create it, so much the more does the complex cosmic poem of the universe demand a great poet of consummate wisdom and infinite power. The rejection of the poet and the message of the poem not only leaves one “without excuse” (v. 20) but also facing “the wrath of God” (v. 18).

Yet an even more amazing poem is the work of transforming redemption accomplished in a lost soul saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). For then it is we, ourselves, who become His poem! This also is a great creative masterpiece, for “we are his workmanship [same word, Greek *poiema*], created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” A life once dead in sin, now born again and walking in good works—this is God’s greatest poetic masterpiece of all!

Both the mighty universe and the soul made new in Christ are special creations of God, and both manifest His greatness and His love. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15) of grace. HMM

Wednesday, March 19

The Indwelling Trinity

“To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Ephesians 3:19)

One of the great doctrines of Christianity is the doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, who lives in the heart of each believer who trusts in Christ for salvation. “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

At the same time, God is one God, so all three persons of the Godhead must, through the Spirit, likewise indwell the believer. Note Paul’s prayer for the believers in the Ephesian church (Ephesians 3:14-19).

“That he would grant you...to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). This request acknowledges the indwelling Spirit. Christ also prayed for this: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter...the Spirit of truth...for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17).

“Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:17) that we might “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (v. 19). Here is the *indwelling* Son. This is also revealed in Galatians 2:20 (“Christ liveth in me”) and Colossians 1:27 (“Christ in you, the hope of glory”).

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). This can only refer to the indwelling Father, as well as the entire tri-unity of the Godhead. Can this indwelling be ours? Note also that the entire prayer was addressed in the first place to “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:14). This, likewise, is a reflection of Christ’s promise: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). *“Filled with all the fulness of God!”* What a wonderful privilege—and responsibility—is ours. HMM

Thursday, March 20

In a Moment of Time

*“And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.”
(Luke 4:5)*

It is interesting that there are just three “moments” mentioned in the New Testament and that there are three different Greek words so translated, each used one time only in the Bible. Furthermore, each of these three “moments” is used in a context that anticipates the future.

First of all, Satan tempted Jesus by flashing before His eyes a vision of the whole world, offering it to Him immediately without His having to endure the cross if He would rule it for the devil. Here the Greek word for “moment” is *stigma*, meaning a “point,” like a period after a sentence. In an infinite “timeline,” it would be just a dot on the line, a “point” in time. Satan’s apparent dominion over this world is only a moment compared to eternity, and Jesus knew this was a poor bargain.

One day, in fact, He will return to reclaim the world from Satan. At that great day, “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). In this passage, the unique word is *atomos*, meaning an indivisible particle. That is, in an “atom of time,” too instantaneous to measure, we shall be changed to be like Him in “his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

Right now, however, our bodies are weak and easily beset with pain and sickness. Nevertheless, we are assured that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). The word here is *parautika*, referring specifically to the present moment. What we must endure “here and now” is so brief compared to the eternity “then and there” that it is not even “worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). HMM

Friday, March 21

Aeldama

“And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; inso-much as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aeldama, that is to say, The field of blood.” (Acts 1:19)

Never was a tract of land more fittingly named than Aeldama, an Aramaic word meaning “field of blood,” for it had been purchased with blood money, “the price of blood” (Matthew 27:6). The purchaser had been Judas (through the “executors” of his estate, as it were, following his suicide), but the blood he sold to acquire the price of the field he had deemed “innocent blood.”

The miserable 30 shekels of silver that consummated this transaction was the price of a slave in ancient Israel (Exodus 21:32), but *this* slave was none other than God incarnate, so the 30 pieces of silver—the price set by the religious leaders of Israel—was the price for the sale of God.

The prophet Zechariah, more than 500 years before, had acted out a prophecy of these strange events: “So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver...a goodly price that I was prised at of them” (Zechariah 11:12-13). Next, according to both prophecy and fulfillment, this blood money was cast down in the temple and then used to buy the potter’s field (Zechariah 11:13; Matthew 27:5, 7-8).

These and many other such details in these accounts constitute a remarkable type and fulfillment of prophecy and thus a testimony of both divine inspiration and divine foreordination. But more than that, it is a striking picture of the price of our salvation, for the “field of blood” typifies the world (Matthew 13:38), and Christ is the man who, searching for “treasure hid in a field... selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Matthew 13:44). All that He had—the very blood of His life—was willingly shed that we, dead in sins and hidden in the world, might be “purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). HMM

Holy Things

“If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the LORD...” (Leviticus 5:15)

The “shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:17) in the Old Testament focuses on physical items and places that were considered especially holy and dedicated.

- Holy place (Exodus 26:33-34)
- Holy altar (Exodus 29:37)
- Holy sacrifices (Exodus 29:33-34)
- Holy garments (Exodus 28:2-4)
- Holy ointment (Exodus 30:31-37)
- Holy vessels (1 Chronicles 22:19)

In the New Testament, however, the “holy things” were focused on the eternal and spiritual holiness that was merely “shadowed” by the earlier ceremonies. Our “holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9) is granted through our “holy faith” (Jude 1:20). God has designed us to become “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).

While we serve the Lord on this earth, we are “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13), expecting that the Lord will make us “to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men....To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God” (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).

Jerusalem on Earth, destroyed and rebuilt throughout history, is the prototype of “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” wherein “the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:2-3). HMM III

Sunday, March 23

Fear Not, Little Flock

“But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Luke 12:31)

In these days of financial worries and rampant materialism, it does us good to reflect on Christ’s teaching concerning our priorities. In this passage, He was teaching His disciples not to be troubled over temporal things (v. 22) but to rest in the fact that He will supply our needs. “If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?” (v. 28). We are not to have our mind set on material things (v. 29), neither are we to be “of doubtful mind,” wavering between hope and fear of the future.

We are to be different. We are children of the King and are in His care. The “nations of the world seek after” (v. 30) these things. Our Father knows that we have need of certain things, and since He loves us and has our best interests at heart, we have nothing to “fear” and can be assured that “all these things shall be added unto [us]” (v. 31).

But more is involved. It is not enough simply to avoid improper fixation on the things of the world; we are to seek rather “the kingdom of God”; we are to be about His business. His priorities should be our priorities. We must strive to know Him and His Word so well that we naturally conform our actions to His desires. If we do so, He not only will take pleasure in supplying our physical needs (v. 31), but also “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (v. 32).

It is our privilege to participate in His work on Earth as He enables. Our part may be to give—“Sell [what you] have, and give alms”—thereby storing up “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not” (v. 33), or to pray, “for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 34). If our primary desire is to enhance the work of the Kingdom, then He will give us that desire, and we will see fruit that lasts for eternity. JDM

Monday, March 24

Building-Vine-Body

*“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”
(Colossians 3:3)*

There are three wonderful figures in the New Testament that depict the relationship of the individual believer to all other believers and to Christ Himself. Christians are like stones in a great building of which He is the foundation and cornerstone. They are little branches in the great vine, which is Christ. They are all members of the great body of which He is the head. In each case, they have been placed “with Christ,” and they derive all life and meaning from Him.

As a stone lying alone on the ground is useless and ugly, so would be a professing Christian who is not truly in Christ. But we, “as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5) as “the household of God; and 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 2:19-22).

Similarly, a branch without its vine and roots is lifeless. Jesus said: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The members of a body are functionless without the head to direct them. “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Corinthians 12:18), and it is intended that we “may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together...maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Outside of Christ, we are useless, lifeless, and without direction. In Him, we become a beautiful temple, a fruitful vine, and a strong body. HMM

Tuesday, March 25

Seeds of Doubt

“He [Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44)

Satan loves to plant seeds of doubt into the minds of both believers and nonbelievers alike. Jesus warns in today’s passage that Satan is an old pro at lying, so to speak. He has been at it “from the beginning.”

The first example we see in the Bible of Satan’s lying is in Genesis 3:4. When tempting Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he says, “Ye shall not surely die.” Going back one chapter to Genesis 2:17, we see God’s original command concerning the tree: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Notice that Satan removed the “not” from “thou shall not eat of it” and inserted it into “thou shalt surely die.” That change was enough to plant seeds of doubt into the minds of Adam and Eve, damaging their relationship with God and ultimately bringing about the Curse of the Fall on the earth and all mankind who would come after them.

Since we have the benefit of recorded Scripture to study and learn from, let’s be aware of Satan’s tactics to spread lies. We know one of Satan’s devices is to attack the validity of God’s Word. “Did God really say...?” seems to be the approach taken in this instance. Satan may also attack the accuracy of God’s Word, adding or removing words from the Holy Scripture to advance his deadly agenda.

Let’s be “vigilant” (1 Peter 5:8) and informed about the ways Satan attacks so we can stand strong in the faith, “for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). DWR

Wednesday, March 26

Babes in Christ

“Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.”
(1 Corinthians 14:20)

The Christian life is entered by the new birth so that everyone who is genuinely born again must begin as a spiritual babe. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children,” said the Lord Jesus, “ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Furthermore, they should continue to be as innocent children insofar as “malice” (Greek *kakia*, literally meaning “wickedness” or “evil”) is concerned. This is an attribute that should diminish, not grow, in a believer.

The sad truth, however, is that many born-again Christians remain spiritual babes in attributes that should characterize strong men and women of God. Paul equated the term “babes in Christ” with carnality, characterized by “envying, and strife, and divisions” (1 Corinthians 3:1, 3). Paul also speaks of those Christians as “children” who are “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). He urges each one to be “speaking the truth in love,” so that we “may grow up into him [Christ] in all things” (Ephesians 4:15).

Spiritual growth, of course, can come only through spiritual food and spiritual exercise. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14).

Christians should become mature, both in understanding and in behavior. The last reference to growth in the Bible applies to each Christian: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). HMM

Thursday, March 27

The Deep Sleep

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.” (Genesis 2:21)

This is the first of seven occurrences of the unusual term “deep sleep” (Hebrew *tardema*) in the Old Testament. In each case it seems to refer to a special state induced by the Lord Himself in order to convey an important revelation to, or through, the person experiencing it.

In Adam’s case, God made a bride for him during his deep sleep from whose seed would be born all the nations of the earth. “And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man” (v. 22). The covenant God made with Adam and Eve delegated dominion over the earth to their descendants.

The second deep sleep was that which “fell upon Abram” (Genesis 15:12) when God passed between the sacrificial animals and established His great covenant with him, promising that from his seed would be born the chosen nation. “And I will make of thee a great nation” (12:2). The Abrahamic covenant also delegated the central land of the earth to Isaac’s descendants (15:18-21) and promised that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (12:3).

But Adam was a type of Christ and Abraham was a type of Christ, and their deep sleeps prefigured His own deep sleep of death on the cross. There He became the last Adam and the promised seed, dying to give life to His great bride and living again to establish a holy nation of the redeemed, fulfilling all of God’s ancient covenants and instituting the eternal New Covenant in His own blood.

When Adam fell into a deep sleep, a bride was born; when Abraham fell into his deep sleep, a nation was born. But when Christ slept deeply in death on the cross and in the tomb, death and hell were judged, and a new world was born. HMM

Mindful of the Words

“That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.” (2 Peter 3:2)

There has long been a tendency for certain Bible teachers to water down the doctrine of verbal inspiration by arguing that it is the “thoughts” of Scripture that count—not the precise words. They forget that the transmission of specific thoughts requires precise words. Ambiguous language is bound to produce fuzzy thinking and uncertain response.

Thus the apostle Peter, in his last chapter, urged his followers to heed the words written by the Old Testament prophets. And Paul—in his final epistle—stressed that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). That is, all the writings are “God-breathed.” The “Scripture,” of course, means the writings, the actual words written down—they are “God-inspired,” not just the concepts.

Similarly John, in his last chapter, warned of the grave danger incurred by anyone who would either “add to” or “take away from” not just the ideas but “the words of the book of this prophecy” (Revelation 22:18-19). Actually, “he which testifieth these things” was not just John but the glorified Jesus Himself (see Revelation 22:16, 20).

In fact, Jesus frequently quoted passages from the Old Testament, sometimes basing His entire thrust on a single word (e.g., John 10:34, 37; arguing on the basis of the word “gods” in Psalm 82:6). In that connection, He stressed that “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35), referring to the actual words written by Moses and the prophets.

Near the end of His earthly ministry, He made a startling promise: “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away” (Mark 13:31). Thus the actual words of the Bible have come ultimately from God, and we do well to learn them and make them a part of our lives. HMM

Saturday, March 29

An Early Confession

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16)

One of the specific reasons Paul wrote this letter to Timothy is contained in our text. The church is to guard and declare the “mystery of godliness.”

A “mystery” in Scripture is something that was previously hidden but is now revealed. Here the mystery is the blessed truth that God is in the business of producing godliness in the lives of men and women; in this context, it is through the work of the church (v. 15). This ministry of the church in proclaiming this mystery was augmented by a doctrinal confession, or hymn, which was presented in:

“God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit.” “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) and was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4). This couplet relates Christ’s human/divine nature. His humanity was evident to all; His divinity was declared through the Spirit.

“Seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles” (or nations). Angels observed, and to some degree participated in, Christ’s earthly ministry, but the salvation and godliness He offered was only to men, “which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12).

“Believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Other teachers have gained a following, but only Christ ascended directly into heaven following His resurrection.

Doctrinal confessions or hymns can be an aid in learning and remembering truth, but the goal of each is godliness—“this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you” (Colossians 1:27). JDM

Sunday, March 30

The Sun of Righteousness

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” (Malachi 4:2)

This is the very last of the numerous Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. After this, there were four centuries of silence from heaven, as far as inspired Scriptures were concerned. Thus, this prophecy must have special significance.

The Messiah (“Christ”) is called “the Sun of righteousness” in contrast to “all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly” that “shall burn as an oven” when “the day cometh” (v. 1)—that “great and dreadful day of the LORD” (v. 5)—and it “shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts” (v. 1).

The “Sun of righteousness” clearly refers to the coming Savior, for He will come “with healing in his wings.” The sun does not have wings, of course, so many commentators think this word refers to the rays of the sun, with their life-sustaining energy. However, the Hebrew word means “wings” and nothing else. It is as though the sun is rising rapidly on great wings, dispelling the world’s darkness with its light, dispensing healing to its sin-sick soul.

The “Sun of righteousness,” of course, can be none other than God Himself, for “the LORD God is a sun and shield” who “will give grace and glory” to “them that walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11). It is the LORD Jesus Christ, the “light of the world” (John 8:12) coming “from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

But “you that fear my name” in that day “shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, . . . when I make up my jewels” (Malachi 3:17). In the last prophecy of the *Old Testament*, Christ is the rising Sun; in the last prophecy of the *New Testament* (Revelation 22:16), He is “the bright and morning star.” HMM

Monday, March 31

Power from Grace

“...and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33)

The apostle Peter observed that believers are to be ministering our “gift” to one another as “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). The words for “gift” and “grace” are very closely related. “Grace” is the most frequent translation for the Greek word *charis*, and *charisma* is most often rendered “gift.”

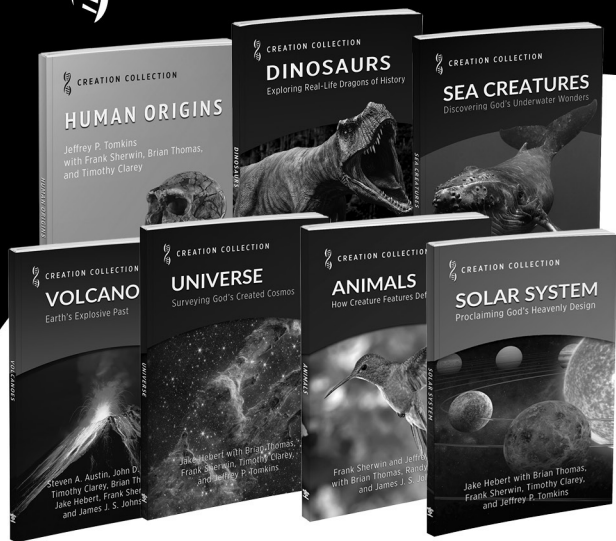
“The working of his mighty power” (Ephesians 1:19) appears to be “the manifestation of the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:7) displayed among God’s people by means of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has graced us with. Paul’s ability to minister was “according to the gift of the grace of God given unto [him, Paul] by the effectual working of his power” (Ephesians 3:7).

Thus, when we preach the gospel, we are using “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). When our lives radically change in response to the “new man” created in us by God, we do so by “the grace of our Lord” that is “exceeding abundant with faith and love” (1 Timothy 1:14). When we access the strength to rise above our infirmities or difficult circumstances, we experience that the Lord’s “grace is sufficient for thee....Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11). HMM III



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Tuesday, April 1

Power of Forgiveness

“...to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 26:18)

All too often we consider forgiveness a mysterious and spiritual transaction that, once accomplished, is a past event that has little to do with our subsequent lives.

It is certainly true that there is a historical point in our earthly lives where the forgiveness of Christ was granted—even though He was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

Christ has subdued, cleansed, and forgotten our sins. “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?...he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18-19). “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isaiah 43:25). “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins” (Isaiah 44:22).

Christ has replaced our sins with His holiness. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new...For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:17, 21).

Christ has given us victory over sin. Since all of the above (and more) is true and active in the lives of all believers, there should be an obvious exhilaration that enables us to confidently stand against whatever “fiery darts” the enemy may throw at us. We are clearly told that “sin shall not have dominion over [us]” (Romans 6:14). And since Jesus already dealt with the “offence” of sin on the cross, we can “reign in life” by Him (Romans 5:17). HMM III

Wednesday, April 2

Son of God

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

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

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

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

Thursday, April 3

The First Stone

“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

When the self-righteous men in the crowd surrounding the woman caught in the act of adultery were about to stone her (apparently indifferent to the man with whom she had been caught!), the Lord Jesus turned them all away with His suggestion that the privilege of casting the first stone should go to one who was without sin of his own (John 8:7). They realized that He knew the condition of their sinful hearts, and “being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one” (John 8:9).

This incident is a perpetual reminder that “the Father... hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22), not to any one of us. We are not qualified to judge others, since we ourselves are also sinners—saved sinners, perhaps, but sinners.

One of the most certain doctrines of Scripture is the universality of sin in human experience. “There is none that doeth good, no, not one,” the Scripture says (Romans 3:12). “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). “Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). “The Scripture hath concluded all under sin” (Galatians 3:22). “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). These and many other Scriptures tell us clearly that, while we urgently need to judge sin in ourselves, we are not qualified to condemn others, at least not on a personal level.

Only the Lord Jesus Christ, being Himself sinless (1 Peter 2:22), can judge a sinner. Thus, it is only He who could be made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and thereby forgive sins and bring salvation. HMM

Friday, April 4

Praising the Lord

“Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.” (Psalm 146:1)

Each of the last five psalms (146–150) begins and ends with “Praise ye the LORD”—i.e., “Hallelujah.” They comprise a sort of “Hallelujah Chorus”: a grand epilogue to the five books that make up the complete book of Psalms.

Each of these five books also ends in a doxology. Note:

Book 1: “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen” (Psalm 41:13).

Book 2: “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen” (Psalm 72:19).

Book 3: “Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen” (Psalm 89:52).

Book 4: “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 106:48).

Book 5: “My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever” (Psalm 145:21).

It is interesting, even if coincidental, that these five final praise psalms—all thanking God for past deliverances and the promise of an eternal future—contain a total of 153 verses. This is the same as the number of great fishes caught in a strong net by the disciples after Christ’s resurrection, and they would go on to fish for men in all nations, bringing them safe to the eternal shores of glory (John 21:10).

Then come the last five songs with their 10 cries of “Hallelujah!” In the New Testament, “Hallelujah” (or “Alleluia”) occurs only in the setting of the victorious marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:1-6). This suggests that these “Hallelujah Psalms” may be sung by the redeemed multitudes as they gather at His throne in heaven. HMM

Saturday, April 5

Power of Faith

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

Believing faith should never be seen as the goal, only the beginning of wonderful growth in the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4-9).

Faith both preserves and protects us. Jesus boldly declared, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me hath [present tense] everlasting life, and shall not come [future imperative] into condemnation; but is passed [pluperfect or past perfect tense] from death unto life” (John 5:24). “For the LORD preserveth the faithful” (Psalm 31:23). That’s pretty clear. Either those words are accurate or they are untrue. There is no middle ground.

Faith is the “shield” against the enemy. Many of us have read about the great “armour of God” described in Ephesians 6. Of the seven “pieces” listed in those verses, we are told, “Above all [take] the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” And when we “resist the devil” (James 4:7), we are to do so “in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9).

Faith gives us power for effective prayer. The “faith as a grain of mustard seed” promise in Matthew 17:20 refers not to *size* or *amount* but to the *quality*. “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed...nothing shall be impossible unto you.” We might translate that as “If you have the same kind of faith as a mustard seed, nothing shall be impossible unto you.” The “ask...seek...find” promise of Matthew 7:7 depends on our confidence in our heavenly Father. And finally, “this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). HMM III

Sunday, April 6

The Stars Also

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

On the fourth day of the creation week, God made the two lights for day and night, and then—almost like an afterthought—“he made the stars also.” Nothing, of course, is an afterthought with God, but this emphasizes the relative importance of these parts of His creation. Whether or not the earth is the *geographical* center of the universe, Earth is the center of God’s *interest* in the universe. This is where He created man and woman in His own image and where He will reign over His creation in the ages to come.

The primary purpose of the stars, as well as the sun and moon, was “to divide the day from the night; and...be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: and...to give light upon the earth” (Genesis 1:14-15). They could not fulfill these functions, of course, if their light could not be seen on the earth, so we can be sure that these heavenly bodies and their light rays were created—like Adam and Eve—“full-grown,” in a state of functioning maturity.

All that can be known scientifically about the stars must be determined from their light intensity and spectra. (Their distances can be measured geometrically only to about 300 light-years.) Any other information—any greater distances, size, temperature, etc.—must be derived by inference, based on some theory of stellar evolution.

Although the stars all look alike (even through a telescope, they all appear as mere points of light), these calculations have shown that each one is unique, as revealed long ago in Scripture: “One star differeth from another star in glory” (1 Corinthians 15:41). Those who believe can learn more about them in the ages to come, for “they that be wise shall shine... as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). HMM

Monday, April 7

Prosperity Versus Contentment

“But godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Timothy 6:6)

In this day of Madison Avenue sales pressures and an ever-increasing array of technological gadgets and creature comforts, the Christian virtue of contentment is a rare commodity. There is even a widespread error among born-again Christians that material prosperity is a token of spirituality and divine approval on an affluent lifestyle.

Instead of a blessing, however, such affluence (if it comes) should be regarded as a testing, for Jesus said, “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48).

Paul was perhaps one of the most faithful and fruitful Christians who ever lived, yet he died penniless in a Roman dungeon. His own testimony concerning material possessions and standards of living was this: “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Philippians 4:11-12).

In the context of our key verse above, the apostle Paul has actually been warning young Timothy against the influence of those who suppose, among other things, “that gain is godliness” and who think that their material prosperity is proof of their spiritual prosperity. “From such” says Paul, “withdraw thyself” (1 Timothy 6:5). Material gain in no way either produces or denotes godliness; rather, godliness itself is the gain if accompanied by contentment in Christ (otherwise, of course, it is not true godliness)! Even the most impoverished believer can acquire riches in heaven, where it *really* counts. In the meantime, “let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). HMM

My Glory

“O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory.” (Psalm 108:1)

This seems a somewhat strange expression. A similar statement is found in Psalm 30:12: “To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent.” Also, note Psalm 57:8: “Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp.”

The Hebrew word is the normal word for “glory,” as in Psalm 19:1, for example: “The heavens declare the glory of God.” But what, then, is meant by “my glory”? The explanation is found in the way the New Testament quotes Psalm 16:9: “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.” In Acts 2:26, this verse is applied to Christ and translated, “Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad.”

It becomes clear, then, that in such passages “my glory” simply means “my tongue.” In fact, the word was translated “tongue” in these and other similar passages in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

But why, then, did the inspired Hebrew text here use the words “my glory” instead of the usual Hebrew word for tongue? The answer probably is that when our tongues are used to praise the Lord, they do, indeed, become our glory!

It is this very ability, among others, that distinguishes man from the animals. Animals can bark, roar, grunt, and send out sonar signals, but they cannot speak in intelligible, symbolic, abstract speech. This is an unbridgeable evolutionary gulf that cannot be crossed, because only men and women were created in the image of God.

Mankind alone has the ability to speak for the simple reason that God desires to communicate with us so that we can respond in praise to Him. This is our glory! “I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations” (Psalm 89:1). HMM

Wednesday, April 9

A Time to Sleep

“And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.”
(Acts 12:6)

Here is an amazing thing. The apostle Peter is in prison, bound with chains, heavily guarded, probably awaiting execution (his close friend James already had been put to death by Herod), and “prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5).

Yet, here he is, fast asleep! He had been imprisoned at least once before for preaching the gospel, and the Lord had miraculously delivered him then (Acts 5:17-19), so why should he be fearful now? The Lord was still in control, and there was nothing Peter himself could do about the situation, so he simply went to sleep. There are, of course, many situations where a Christian needs to stay alert and watchful. But there are also times when he has done all he can do, and there is nothing to be accomplished by further worrying, so he must leave it in the Lord’s hands.

In Peter’s case, he was sleeping so soundly that when an angel from God came to deliver him from his “impossible” circumstance, the angel had to smite him on the side to awaken him (v. 7)! In fact, he was still so sleepy that he did not really “come to himself” until the angel left him out on the street alone (v. 11).

Then, of course, Peter rushed back to the house of Mark’s mother, where the church was praying for him (v. 12), to tell them of the amazing answer to their prayers. As with Peter, there are times when we must simply “stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13), “so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6). HMM

Thursday, April 10

Headstone of the Corner

“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.” (Psalm 118:22)

That this enigmatic verse is really a Messianic prophecy is evident from the fact that Christ Himself applied it thus. “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?” (Matthew 21:42). The Jewish leaders had refused Him as their Messiah, but the day would come when they would have to confess their sad mistake.

Later, addressing them concerning “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead,” the apostle Peter said, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner” (Acts 4:10-11).

This analogy evidently refers back to the building of Solomon’s great temple a thousand years earlier. At that time, each of the great stones for its beautiful walls was “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 6:7). According to tradition, there was one stone that didn’t fit with the others, so the builders moved it out of the way. At last, when the temple tower was almost complete, they found they were missing the pinnacle stone that would cap all the rest. Finally they realized that the stone they had rejected had been shaped to be the head stone at the topmost corner of the tower.

Peter referred to it again in his epistle: “Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious. . . . Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient” (1 Peter 2:6-8). HMM

Friday, April 11

Jabez's Model Prayer

“And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.” (1 Chronicles 4:10)

Scripture spotlights Jabez amidst an otherwise plain chronology in 1 Chronicles 1–9. Three aspects of his model prayer show the kind of heart the Lord appreciates.

First, Jabez resisted the temptation to treat God like a vending machine by asking Him for any self-serving thing. He instead prayed, “Oh, that thou wouldest bless me indeed,” leaving the Lord to choose what, when, how, and even if to bless. Now that’s trust.

Second, he asked that the Lord “enlarge my coast.” He did not say, “Enlarge my bank account.” Rather, it could be that he wanted a wider sphere of influence for the Lord. This would imply that Jabez really desired others to know “the God of Israel.”

Third, Jabez asked the Lord to help keep him holy—not necessarily happy. He invited God’s hand to “be with me,” not to make him wealthy but to “keep me from evil.” He had the same mind as Peter, who wrote, “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 11:45).

How many of our prayers have we wasted in either seeking selfish gain from our Lord, seeking secure circumstances instead of Him, or seeking His blessing amidst a refusal to do what’s right in one area or another? It’s a good bet that the Lord would appreciate it if we instead, like Jabez, seek His blessing according to His will, ask Him for help in pointing more people to Him, and cling to His help to live holy lives set apart for Him. BDT

Saturday, April 12

The Law Fulfilled...in Us?

“That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:4)

A miraculous exchange happens when we daily live for our Savior. We give up striving to be good enough in our own power. This is idolatry. We were born with this sinful nature. It compels us to deceive ourselves into thinking that we can be God, knowing enough good and evil to call all the right shots. Nonsense. When we repent, we admit that we cannot be good enough on our own and that we need outside help.

And help us He can! “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). Knowing I can never be righteousness for myself, He works righteousness through me.

“The righteousness of the law” from today’s verse is nothing less than perfection. People cannot achieve that, but we all need it. Jesus is perfect, however! He applies that perfection to anyone’s account the moment they repent of sin and trust Him. Now what? He does all the work “in us”! Just trust Him and obey.

It has always worked that way. Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead and behaved like that was true (Hebrews 11:19). James said of Abraham, “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:22).

Similarly, as you “reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11), you can walk “after the Spirit.” We then do what’s right—the “righteousness of the law.” “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected” (1 John 2:5), and thus the law is “fulfilled in us” by Him. BDT

Sunday, April 13

Zechariah's Strange Prophecy

“All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.” (Matthew 21:4-5)

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on an unbroken donkey colt on that momentous first day of the week, just a week before His resurrection, the multitudes quickly recognized that He was fulfilling an ancient prophecy and thereby specifically claiming to be their long-awaited Messiah. The prophecy was that of Zechariah 9:9, and the people in turn began to fulfill David's even more ancient prophecy, laying palm branches in His path, and crying out: “Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD” (Psalm 118:26).

This is one of the few events in the life of Christ that are recorded in all four gospels, though only Matthew notes it as the fulfillment of prophecy. And what a strange prophecy it was! One would think that the anticipated King would come riding on a great white horse, ready to put down all His enemies (and indeed He shall do exactly that some day—see Revelation 19:11).

But here He comes riding on a colt, the foal of an ass, not high and mighty, but meek and lowly! Ah, but as Zechariah prophesied, He comes “just, and having salvation” (Zechariah 9:9). And the salvation He was bringing was not deliverance from Roman subjugation but eternal deliverance from sin and its awful wages.

These same multitudes that hailed Him soon were following their high priest in clamoring for His crucifixion. Nevertheless, He someday will fulfill Zechariah's later prophecy: “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him” (Zechariah 12:10). Then, finally, indeed, “the LORD shall be king over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9). HMM

Monday, April 14

Questions About Creation

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.” (Job 38:4)

In chapters 38–41 of Job is recorded a remarkable series of 77 questions about the creation—questions which God asked Job and his philosophizing friends and that they were utterly unable to answer. At the end of the searching examination, Job could only confess, “Therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not” (Job 42:3). Modern evolutionists, despite all their arrogant pretensions, still are not able to answer them either, over 35 centuries later!

But there is one who can answer them, and His answers echo back from another ancient document, the marvelous eighth chapter of Proverbs. To God’s first question, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?” comes His answer: “When he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him” (Proverbs 8:29-30). The speaker here is the divine wisdom. He is the Word of God, the preincarnate Son of God, soon to become the Son of man. In this amazing chapter, He echoes an answer to the most searching of God’s inscrutable questions to Job and his friends:

“Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth?” (Job 38:8). “He set a compass [literally ‘sphericity’] upon the face of the depth: . . . When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment” (Proverbs 8:27, 29). “Hast thou commanded the morning . . . and caused the dayspring to know his place?” (Job 38:12). “When he prepared the heavens, I was there” (Proverbs 8:27).

Our Savior was there! “For by him were all things created” (Colossians 1:16). One more question: “Have the gates of death been opened unto thee?” (Job 38:17). Yes, and they have not prevailed! “For whoso findeth me findeth life, . . . all they that hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:35-36). HMM

Tuesday, April 15

The Light and the Sun

“The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun.” (Psalm 74:16)

One of the traditional “discrepancies” attributed by the skeptics to the Genesis account of creation is the fact that there was “light” (Hebrew *or*) on the first day of the creation week, but God did not create the “lights” (Hebrew *ma-or*) to rule the day and the night until the fourth day.

However, it is interesting that modern evolutionary cosmologists find no problem in having light before the sun. According to their speculative reconstruction of cosmic history, light energy was produced in the imaginary “Big Bang” 15 billion years ago, whereas the sun “evolved” only five billion years ago. Thus, even in their attempts to destroy the divine revelation of Genesis, they inadvertently find it necessary to return to its concepts. Light energy somehow had to be “prepared” before the sun and other stars could ever be set up to serve as future generators of light energy. The fact that light is an entity independent of the sun and other heavenly bodies is one of the remarkable scientific insights of the Bible. As the basic form of energy (even intrinsic in the very nature of matter, as expressed in the famous Einstein equation), it is significant that the first recorded word spoken by the Creator was “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3).

In this chapter, the psalmist is entreating the Lord of light, the Creator of all things, to deliver His people from those who are seeking to destroy all genuine faith in the true God of heaven. “The tumult of those that rise up against thee increaseth continually” (Psalm 74:23). Nevertheless, “God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (v. 12). The mighty God of creation, who established and controls all the basic energies of the cosmos and their manifestation on the earth, is fully able to defeat His enemies and establish His people. We can be sure of that. HMM

Wednesday, April 16

The Old Rugged Cross

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

As we ponder the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, a fuller understanding should bring us to an ever-deeper reliance on and identification with Him. To assist us in examining the work of Christ on the cross, let us use the beloved hymn “The Old Rugged Cross.” Here we will find its words reflecting a deep and abiding love for Christ and His cross. The next four days we will, in turn, study each of its four verses, but today note its chorus:

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it some day for a crown.*

Our text reminds us that there is no worth in any deed of our own, including even a full adherence to the law of Moses (Galatians 6:12-13). Only through the cross and the salvation by grace made possible by the cross do we have any standing before God. We must cherish the cross and cling to it! Thus, we can say with Paul that this “world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”—its sinful allurements and the recognition of men of no value.

“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). All our legitimate accomplishments, those true trophies or “[crowns] of rejoicing” (1 Thessalonians 2:19) done in His power and for His glory, will be cast before His throne (Revelation 4:10) in recognition of His worth and kingship. His cross made it all possible. So I'll cherish the old rugged cross. JDM

Thursday, April 17

On a Hill Far Away

*“And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.”
(John 19:17)*

The Hebrew word *golgotha* and the Latin word *calvarie* actually mean “skull.” The Romans had selected a place of execution outside Jerusalem (Hebrews 13:12) but near the city (John 19:20), near a public highway (Matthew 27:39), and easily visible from some distance away (Mark 15:40). This has led many to speculate that it was on a hill, as in the first verse of the well-loved hymn “The Old Rugged Cross.”

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.*

Truly His cross involved great suffering: “Christ also suffered for us...Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:21, 24). Likewise, it involved great shame: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). But this suffering and shame was not in vain, for as we see in both passages above, it was on our behalf. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

However, God’s dearest and best, indeed God’s “only begotten Son” (John 3:16), was slain, not so much for “friends” but for enemies! A world of lost sinners put Him on the cross. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:8, 10). So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross. JDM

Friday, April 18

Dark Calvary

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.” (Matthew 27:45)

The second verse of the grand old hymn “The Old Rugged Cross” contains much truth, rich and deep.

*Oh, that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
Has a wondrous attraction for me;
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above
To bear it to dark Calvary.*

The world despises the cross and the One on the cross. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3). And yet, even in His bloodied and broken form, there is a wondrous attraction, for “surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: ...he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (vv. 4-5).

His death substituted for ours. He was the sacrificial “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This Lamb is none other than God the Son, who willingly “took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ...and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). Remarkably, even God the Father “despised” Him as He hung on the cross, for God is holy and for our sakes had “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The apex of Christ’s suffering came, as we see in our text, when God the Father separated Himself from His beloved Son, “forsaking” (v. 46) Christ to suffer the awful pangs of hell that we deserved. So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross. JDM

Saturday, April 19

Stained with Blood So Divine

“But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, ... one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith there came out blood and water.” (John 19:33-34)

As with many of the great hymns, the verses of “The Old Rugged Cross” tell a story when considered in sequence. The first verse states the general doctrine of the cross; the second speaks of the necessity of the incarnation to accomplish the cross’ purpose; the third, quoted below, gives details of the crucifixion and what it accomplished, and the last verse rehearses the results, both now and in the future.

*In the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
A wondrous beauty I see;
For t’was on that old cross Jesus suffered and died
To pardon and sanctify me.*

That old rugged cross was stained with blood, as is obvious from our text. But this blood was special, for “ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:18-20).

The divine Lamb of God suffered and died on the cross, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14), “that he might sanctify the people with his own blood” (Hebrews 13:12).

But the old rugged cross was not the only thing stained that day, for “the blood of Jesus Christ...cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The saints in heaven are portrayed as having “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross. JDM

Sunday, April 20

I Will Ever Be True

“...looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

The concluding verse of our song, “The Old Rugged Cross,” contains a commitment to follow Christ in this life and looks forward to life with Him in eternity.

*To the old rugged cross I will ever be true,
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then He'll call me some day to my home far away,
Where His glory forever I'll share.*

When coupled with the preceding scriptural verse, our text mirrors these thoughts: “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (v. 1). In this life, we have both the victorious examples of many that have gone before (Hebrews 11) and Christ Himself. Both He and they have suffered joyfully, and so can we: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you,...but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye” (1 Peter 4:12-14).

Once Christ fully “endured the cross,” He rose from the dead in victory over death to take His rightful place “at the right hand of the throne of God.” He now calls us to be “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20), “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:7). He’ll call us some day to Himself, where we shall “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6), “and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross. JDM

Monday, April 21

Christ Our Substitute

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” (Hebrews 9:28)

There are two specific references in the New Testament to Christ “bearing” our sins as He died on the cross. In addition to our text above, the other is 1 Peter 2:24: “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.”

However, the same word (Greek *anaphero*) is also used with a similar thrust in Hebrews 7:27, where it is translated “offer up”: “Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.”

When Christ died, He died as a substitutionary sacrifice, “offering up” our sins for judgment and punishment by a holy God as He simultaneously “offered up” Himself as the One who would submit to that judgment and bear that punishment. He was able to do this because He was both the infinite Creator and the one sinless man who did not need to offer a sacrifice for His own sins. He was willing to do this because He loved us and wanted to save us.

This doctrine of substitutionary sacrifice is central to the gospel of salvation, and therefore precious to the saint. But its central importance likewise means that it is profoundly offensive to the natural man. Many acclaim Him as a great martyr or a great teacher, but they deny either His deity or His humanity and certainly deny the universal efficacy of His shed blood in substitutionary sacrifice for the sin of a lost world.

Nevertheless, He did bear the sins of “the many,” and He did completely settle our account with God. In both Hebrews 7:27 and 9:28 (as cited above), the word “once” means, literally, “once for all.” He did have to die once—but only once—as our sin-bearing substitute. Thus, when He comes again, it will be “without sin unto salvation.” HMM

Tuesday, April 22

Threescore Years and Ten

“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” (Psalm 90:10)

When Moses wrote these words near the end of his life, he was 120 years old (Deuteronomy 34:7), but all the rest of the people of Israel (except Caleb and Joshua) who had been over 20 at the beginning of the 40-year wilderness wanderings had died there (Numbers 14:28-34), and so there were no others over 60 years old.

In former days men had lived much longer. Adam died at 930 and Noah at 950, but then Shem only lived to 600, and Abraham died at 175 years of age. Thus, the normal lifespan by Moses' time was down to 70 or 80 years, and he prophesied that this would continue.

It is remarkable that, with all the increase in medical knowledge, this figure has stayed about the same, and there seems to be little the gerontologists can do to increase it.

Furthermore, the latter years are largely “labor and sorrow,” just as God told Adam when his sin brought God's Curse on the earth (Genesis 3:17-20). No matter how much we try to prolong our lives, we are “soon cut off.”

But then, we “fly away”! The soul/spirit complex of the Christian believer, released from its weary body, flies away to be with the Lord. Those left behind may sorrow, but “to depart, and to be with Christ...is far better.” The Christian may confidently say with Paul, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:23, 21). In the meantime, as our time grows shorter, it is more important than ever that we “walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5). “So teach us to number our days,” prayed Moses (and so should we), “that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). HMM

Wednesday, April 23

Your Personal Eclipse

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalm 30:5)

A total solar eclipse is awesome in the true sense of the word. If you are in the path of totality, you can see the moon pass directly between the sun and your location on Earth. A dusky darkness covers everything. After a few minutes, the moon continues on its way, and full sunlight returns.

This experience may trigger a thought, a parallel to the times of “darkness” we experience in each of our lives. We lose a loved one, experience a health or financial setback, or are betrayed by a trusted friend. All these events can bring on a “personal eclipse” of our faith if we focus on the darkness.

In an eclipse, the moon does not affect the sun’s light-generating abilities, but it does affect our reception of the light. So the sun shines just like it does every day, and the darkness we experience is limited in intensity, location, and duration. While our trials may seem like total darkness has settled over us, we must remember that just as the sun continues to shine uninterrupted behind the moon during a total eclipse, God is still there shining His goodness over our lives.

“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him” (Psalm 91:15). God does not promise believers a trouble-free life on this earth, but His promise to be with us in our troubles is what we need to cling to until our personal eclipse passes. Ultimately, for the believer all darkness will be eliminated. “And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:5). DWR

Thursday, April 24

Who Shall Let It?

*“Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?”
(Isaiah 43:13)*

This is one of the classic “archaisms” of the King James Version, where the English word “let” does not mean “allow” (as we now use the word) but almost the exact opposite. This particular English word was originally written and pronounced “lat” and was from the same Teutonic root as the word “late.” Thus, to our Old English ancestors, it meant essentially “make late,” or “hinder.” Note its similar use in the King James in Romans 1:13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

However, the Hebrew word (*shub*) from which it is translated in the verse of our text is extremely flexible, being rendered no less than 115 different ways in the Old Testament and occurring about 1,150 times altogether, with the context controlling its meaning in any given case.

In this context, the great theme is that of God as omnipotent Creator and only Savior. The first occurrence of *shub*, however, is at the time of the primeval Curse on the creation, implanted in the very dust of the earth because of Adam’s sin. To Adam, God had said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). Here, *shub* is twice rendered “return,” and this is the way it is most often translated in its later occurrences.

God therefore challenges every man: “When I work, who can return anything [or anyone] to its [or his] prior condition?” Though none can deliver out of His hand, or “make late” His work, He has promised to be our Savior “and will not remember thy sins” (Isaiah 43:11, 25). When it is time for God to do His work—whether of creation or judgment or salvation—there is no one in all His creation who can “make it late”! HMM

Friday, April 25

The Flesh and the Spirit

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)

The conflict between flesh and spirit is a frequent theme in Scripture, beginning way back in the antediluvian period: “And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh” (Genesis 6:3). The “flesh,” of course, refers to the physical body with all its feelings and appetites, while man’s “spirit” refers especially to his spiritual nature with its ability to understand and communicate in terms of spiritual and moral values, along with its potential ability to have fellowship with God.

Because of sin, however, the natural man is spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), and “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). When the flesh dominates, even the apostle Paul would have to say, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). This aspect of human nature became so dominant in the antediluvian world that “all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Genesis 6:12), and God had to wash the world clean with the Flood.

Now, however, the substitutionary death of Christ brings salvation and spiritual life to all who receive Him by the Holy Spirit. “If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:10-11). By the Lord Jesus Christ, the human spirit is made alive right now through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the body’s resurrection is promised when Christ returns.

“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh.” The daily challenge to the believer is this: “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:24-25). HMM

Saturday, April 26

To Be Like Him

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15-16)

Scripture admonishes us as Christians to be like our Lord and Savior in “all manner of conversation,” or all manner of life. We are His earthly witnesses, and we must so order our lives that we are an adequate reflection of Him.

We are to be like Him in the purity of our lives. As our text points out, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). “Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Our daily walk and lives should be patterned after Him. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:7).

Furthermore, we are to be like Him in love. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God...for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). We are to be willing to suffer unjustly without revenge, “because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:21-22).

Being like Him involves a life of service, as well. “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15).

Christ has forgiven each of us many times, even though our sins grieve Him deeply. He stands ready to forgive and restore fellowship, and so should we. With His help, we can emulate Him, even when we are wronged. “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). JDM

Sunday, April 27

Habitation for God

“...until I find out a place for the LORD, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood. We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at his footstool.” (Psalm 132:5-7)

These fascinating verses may well have a double meaning: first, a retrospective reference to David’s desire to build a temple for God, and second, a prophecy concerning a still-future habitation for God. Ephratah was the same as Bethlehem, the birthplace of both David and his greater son, Jesus.

The writer of this psalm may have been King Hezekiah, a contemporary of the prophet Micah, who had written: “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, . . . out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). He was also a contemporary of Isaiah, who had written concerning this same coming Son: “His name shall be called . . . the mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6).

David had desired to build an earthly habitation for the mighty God of Israel; Isaiah had said this “mighty God” would be “a child born” and “a Son given”; and Micah said He would be born in Bethlehem Ephratah. Our psalmist must have been thinking about these truths when he saw, through the future eyes of those “in the fields of the wood” “at Ephratah,” this “place for the LORD,” who then would go to “worship at His footstool.”

Some 800 years later, “there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields” at Bethlehem Ephratah when a great host of angels told them the promised Savior had come, directing them to go to His “habitation” to worship Him. And that was where they did, indeed, find Him, “wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:8, 12), and they were the very first to “worship at his footstool.” HMM

Monday, April 28

The God of Heaven

“And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” (Jonah 1:9)

It was by these words that the prophet Jonah identified himself to the merchants of Tarshish as he was fleeing on their ship from the presence of the Lord. This special title, “the God of heaven,” seems generally to have been used by the Jews when they were talking to men of other religions, stressing that their God was no mere tribal deity but the true God who had created the very heavens.

The title was first used by Abraham, speaking to his servant: “And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth” (Genesis 24:3). At this time, the nation of Israel existed only in the promise of this “God of heaven.”

It also appears frequently in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, first in the decree of Cyrus the Persian: “The LORD God of heaven...hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:2). Even though the Persians followed lesser gods, Cyrus knew that the one God of heaven was the Creator. The name then reappears several times in the book of Daniel, who was living in the palace of the heathen king of Babylon. Its final Old Testament occurrence is Daniel 2:44: “The God of heaven [shall] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed.”

In the New Testament it occurs only twice, both in Revelation. In one instance, John writes that the ungodly nations “blasphemed the God of heaven”; in the other, he says they “gave glory to the God of heaven” (Revelation 16:11; 11:13). In our own witnessing today, especially to those who don’t know or believe the Bible, it is also good to stress that our God is not just the God of Judeo-Christian tradition but the Creator of all things. HMM

Tuesday, April 29

Showers of Blessing

“And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.” (Ezekiel 34:26)

This verse provided the inspiration for the old gospel hymn “Showers of Blessing.” While it applies specifically to Israel, it states a divine principle that believers of all times have rightly appropriated to their own lives. The same word (“showers”) is also frequently translated “rain,” speaking of the rain that followed Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal at the end of the three-year drought. “And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain” (1 Kings 18:41).

In general, the word is most commonly used to indicate very heavy rains. In fact, its first occurrence is in connection with the great Flood. “The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:12). This rain had poured forth from the windows (literally “sluiceways”) of heaven, and it provides an impressive picture of the tremendous showers of blessing that God desires to pour down on His people.

In the context of our key verse, the promised showers follow the condition of the preceding verses: “And I the LORD will be their God....And I will make with them a covenant of peace” (Ezekiel 34:24-25). The greatest blessings of God, accordingly, must follow the knowledge of God and the peace of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

No doubt the greatest of all spiritual blessings, at least in this life, is the inspired Word of God, and the same word is so used: “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud...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 55:10-11). HMM

Wednesday, April 30

Thanks for Everything

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20)

Being thankful for everything that happens in his or her life to a Christian believer is listed in this section of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians as one of the evidences that a Christian is indeed “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

That is not all. Not only for everything, but in everything we should give thanks to God. “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). These two commands are easy to obey when the living is easy, as the song says, though we might easily forget to do so. But when the Lord is allowing us to hurt for a while, thanksgiving becomes hard. It is hard while we are experiencing the difficulty and just as hard when it has passed with no relief in sight. The two small prepositions “in” and “for” are different in New Testament Greek as well as in modern English, and God really wants us to learn how to thank Him both during and after the hard experience.

This is because He has allowed it for a good purpose! The apostle James urges us to “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (that is, “various testings”), “knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4). Paul says that we can even “glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:3-5). Patience and real love will come to characterize a habitually thankful Christian. HMM

Thursday, May 1

Joy in Prison

“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” (Philippians 2:17)

The epistles Paul penned while in prison include Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and likely 2 Timothy. One can imagine Satan’s glee when the apostle was first thrown into prison. But cell and chains didn’t silence Paul or thwart his joy.

The book of Philippians, “the epistle of joy,” was likely written from an imprisonment in Rome. Here we see a perfect example of a common biblical theme: something happens that appears evil, but God uses it for good. “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20).

Think of it this way: God “sentenced” Paul to pray and write for a season. It was a retreat of sorts, a time of great intimacy between Paul and his Redeemer. Far from being despondent about his incarceration, Paul embraced it. He didn’t beg to be free, ask his friends to bribe the guards, or even insist on his innocence. He rather encouraged believers to “stand fast” for the faith (Philippians 1:27, 4:1).

Paul yielded to God’s will, and this was the key to his peace in prison. Only then could he say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). The Holy Spirit was present in the prison with Paul, and the Spirit inspired every word Paul wrote.

God advances the gospel despite and through apparent obstacles. “The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12).

Are you in a place you don’t want to be? Remember that the Holy Spirit is with you in that seemingly dark place. God can and will use you wherever you are. There is purpose in the trial—the furtherance of the gospel and joy. “In thy presence is fulness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). MJS

Friday, May 2

Three Freedoms in Christ

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 John 2:16)

We grow up “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” suffering temptations from three angles (Philippians 2:15). One angle tempts us to fulfill “the lust of the flesh.” “The lust of the eyes” tempts us to desire that which is off limits, and “the pride of life” tempts us “to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think” (Romans 12:3). Even worse, no one has the power to deliver himself from these three angles. “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). Jesus can deliver! He offers freedom from each angle of temptation.

Satan approached Eve and Adam, who succumbed to all three temptations (Genesis 3:6). We inherit their sin nature since we descended from them. But Matthew 4:1-11 records how Jesus followed His Father when the devil tempted Him in the same three ways. He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). His victories qualify Him to free us!

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). Those who trust Christ for new life can live it with three new freedoms: to serve the Father instead of the flesh, to desire Him over the world’s lousy substitutes for knowing Him, and to enjoy His acceptance instead of having to pridefully labor to be somebody. “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Romans 6:22). BDT

Saturday, May 3

Preciousness

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

The verses leading up to our text explain why we are so special in God’s eyes. We find the key in verse 7, which literally reads, “For you, therefore that believe is the preciousness,” since the Greek word is a noun and not an adjective. But what is this *preciousness*? The word means honor or honorableness, and in slightly different forms it is so translated in 1 Peter 1:7 and 3:7. But whose honor or worthiness is being discussed in this passage?

Peter answers both of these questions in the immediate context. Speaking of the Lord, he calls Him “precious... a chief corner stone, elect, precious” (1 Peter 2:4, 6). Christ, in God’s eyes, is precious. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Why is He precious? For His purity, love, desire for God’s will, etc.—all the ways (and more) in which we are *not* precious.

If we choose to remain in disobedient unbelief (1 Peter 2:7), the stone is made “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word” (v. 8). Christ, God’s beloved Son, and His atoning blood are so precious to God that there is a limit to His patience toward those who reject them. God will not allow His Son to be “disallowed” or disobeyed without penalty. Worthlessness is the state of those who reject Him, and judgment awaits them.

If we disbelieve, we have no hope, but “he that believeth on him shall not be confounded [literally, ‘shall positively not be disappointed’]” (v. 6). Our faith is well-founded. If we place our trust in Him, His preciousness is transferred to us. When God the Father looks at one who truly believes, He sees not only Christ’s sinlessness, but He sees His *preciousness*. JDM

Sunday, May 4

Feeding on Truth or Wind

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” (Psalm 37:3)

Although there are many promises in Scripture to the effect that the Lord will provide material sustenance to those who are faithful to Him (Matthew 6:33), this particular verse evidently refers to an even more blessed promise. The word translated “verily” is better rendered by “truth,” so the latter part of the verse could best be given as: “thou shalt be fed on the truth.” That is, the spiritual life of the one who trusts in Christ will be fed and sustained by truth.

In contrast, the unbeliever feeds on that which is not true. The one “who hath formed a god” (Isaiah 44:10) for himself will soon taste bitterness on his tongue. “He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isaiah 44:20). Those who trust in human deliverance will be like Israel depending on Egypt and Assyria. “Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation” (Hosea 12:1). The diet of false prophets is more bitter still. “Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall” (Jeremiah 23:15).

Wind and ashes, wormwood and gall; such is the spiritual food of those who reject the truth of the Word of God.

To the believer, however, the Scriptures are as much a daily need for the soul as bread for the body. As Job said long ago, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). Moses testified as follows: “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3). HMM

Monday, May 5

Alive into Heaven

“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” (2 Kings 2:11)

This remarkable event—the translation of Elijah alive into heaven without dying—was altogether miraculous, but it really happened! Among other things, it assures us that heaven is a real place in this created universe, for Elijah is still there in his physical body, still alive, to this very day.

The prophet Enoch, who also served God in a time of deep apostasy, had likewise been taken into heaven without dying (that is, into the “third heaven,” beyond the starry heaven, where God’s throne is), as recorded in Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5. Enoch’s prophecies, addressed to the entire world of mankind, were given at approximately the midpoint of the period from Adam to Abraham, whereas those of Elijah, addressed only to Israel, were given at essentially the midpoint of the time from Abraham to Christ. Both were caught up alive into heaven before their ministries were finished. It is possible that they will return again to Earth as God’s “two witnesses” who will prophesy to both Jews and Gentiles in the last days (note Malachi 4:5-6; Revelation 11:3-12) and then finally be slain and resurrected.

In any case, there will also be one entire generation of believers who will—like Enoch and Elijah—be caught up alive into heaven. “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” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

This could very well be our generation! And “when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). HMM

Tuesday, May 6

When He Shall Appear

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” (1 John 2:28)

There are many glorious promises associated with the great promise that Christ Himself shall once again appear in person here on planet Earth. For example, Paul says, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

Similarly, the apostle Peter promises, “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:4). The writer of Hebrews first reminds us of His former appearance on Earth: “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). Then the promise is: “Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (v. 28).

Perhaps the most wonderful promise associated with His second appearing is given through the apostle John: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

Therefore, when He shall appear, we shall appear with Him in glory, we shall receive an unfading crown of glory, and we shall be like Him, without sin unto salvation. These promises even now constitute an incentive for each believer to purify himself even as He is pure.

But there is also the sobering warning in our text associated with the soon-coming time when He shall appear. We should abide in Him (that is, continue in Him, hour after hour), careful that whatever we do, wherever we go, we are in no danger of being ashamed before Him when He shall appear! HMM

Wednesday, May 7

Waxing Old

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.” (Isaiah 51:6)

This verse is typical of many Scriptures that contrast this present decaying, dying order of things (characterizing a world under God’s Curse) with the things that are not dying and that will survive into the new order when the Curse is removed (Revelation 22:3). Even the present “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,” Jesus said (Matthew 24:35). God, the Creator, who imposed the Curse because of man’s sin, is not Himself subject to it. “They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: . . . as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end” (Psalm 102:26-27).

As our text assures us, God’s salvation and righteousness shall never be changed, even when Earth and heaven flee away. The same contrasts exist in the biological realm. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8).

Human nature exhibits a similar phenomenon. “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; . . . they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:30-31).

This principle, in fact, applies to the entire creation: “Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption [literally ‘decay’] into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). HMM

Thursday, May 8

Heartfelt Prayer

“Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.” (Lamentations 3:41)

It is so easy to let our prayers become routine and repetitious, and we need to remember that God listens more closely to our hearts than the phrases from our lips. The Lord Jesus cautioned us about this: “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him” (Matthew 6:7-8).

Many people will lift their hands to pray or prostrate themselves on the ground. Some will stand; some will kneel. Some shout, some pray silently, some even leap and dance. Some will write out their prayers and then read them to an audience. Others will pray eloquently and at great length. But the thing that counts far more than posture or eloquence is our attitude of heart. We must lift up our hearts to the Lord, not just our hands or our voices. Then He will hear in heaven!

We need to feel as the psalmist felt: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psalm 42:1). Our hearts need first to be right, of course—pure and true in His sight. “Call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18). “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22).

Our prayers must also come from a believing heart. “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” Otherwise, “let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:6-7). With these conditions met, the Christian is ready to pray, and then he must pray from deep within his pure, true, believing heart, and God will answer. “The effectual fervent [one word in the Greek, *energeo*] prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). HMM

Friday, May 9

The Christian's Calling

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."
(Ephesians 4:1)

The Christian's calling in Christ is a high calling. Since we are encouraged to walk in a manner worthy of this calling, it behooves us to make careful study of it, lest our lifestyle bring reproach to the One who has called us. Consider the following sampling of the uses of this important word.

First, the calling is "of God" and irrevocable (Romans 11:29). We are called "by his grace" (Galatians 1:15) and "into the grace of Christ" (Galatians 1:6). We are called "out of darkness" and "into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Furthermore, we are "called to be saints" (Romans 1:7). He has "called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9). We are "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1), and in response, we should "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

The New Testament writers also mention many things to which we are called. We are "called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). We are "called unto liberty" (Galatians 5:13) and are now free to "serve one another," even though it means accepting the call to suffering. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). The "eternal life, whereunto thou art also called," may not come easily, for it involves the "good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). We are called "to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3), even "his eternal glory by Christ Jesus" (1 Peter 5:10), for we are "called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). JDM

Saturday, May 10

A Righteous Desire

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.”
(Matthew 6:33)

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were quite religious in their behavior, but our Lord often took them to task because “all their works they do for to be seen of men” (Matthew 23:5).

God’s kingdom is first priority. The Lord’s admonition in our text was given to focus His followers beyond the “ordinary” desires and needs of their physical existence. We are expected to “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). As promised, when we are rightly focused, “all these other things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Yield to righteousness. We become “servants” of those things that we “obey,” and we obey that which we have “yielded” ourselves to (Romans 6:16). It is not possible to “serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24). Our “members” (our physical bodies) can either become “instruments” of ungodliness or of righteousness (Romans 6:13). We either “walk” after the Spirit or after the flesh (Romans 8:1).

Doggedly pursue godliness. “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Timothy 6:11). Even though our “new man” longs for righteousness, and we consciously yield ourselves to seek and serve God’s kingdom, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:25).

We must never become slack in our diligence. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). HMM III

Sunday, May 11

The Faith of Our Mothers

“...when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” (2 Timothy 1:5)

The “dearly beloved son” (v. 2) of the apostle Paul was a young disciple whose strong and sincere Christian faith was due, more than anything else, to the lives and teachings of a godly mother and grandmother. As Paul wrote to Timothy in his last letter, “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

Timothy’s mother was a Christian Jew (Acts 16:1), but his father was a Greek who evidently was not a believer. In the ideal Christian home, the father is to assume spiritual leadership (Ephesians 5:22, 25; 6:4), but countless fathers, for some reason, are either unable or unwilling to do this. There have been many homes where a mother or grandmother, usually by default, has had to assume this all-important responsibility, and the Christian world owes these godly women a great debt of gratitude. The writer himself was raised in such a home, and much of his own concern for the Word of God is due to the concerned dedication of a Christian mother and two Christian grandmothers.

It is significant that the fifth of God’s Ten Commandments requires children to honor their parents, and it is the only one of the 10 that carries a special promise: “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:2-3). Every godly parent is worthy of real honor every day—not just once each year. And when a Christian mother, like Timothy’s mother, must assume all the responsibility for leading her children in the ways of God, she deserves very special praise. HMM

Monday, May 12

Undeserved Suffering

“Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1)

This cry of the psalmist has been echoed times without number by those persecuted for their faith. “Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, why sleepest thou, O LORD? arise, cast us not off for ever. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?” (Psalm 44:22-24). Consequently, one of the great mysteries of life is the suffering of the righteous. How can a God of love and power allow such undeserved suffering in His creation?

The fact is, however, that there is no such thing as undeserved suffering, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The reason there is suffering in the world is that there is sin in the world. Even though one’s particular experience of suffering may or may not be directly related to his particular sin, all of us are sinners before God and therefore deserve nothing *but* suffering and judgment in the sight of a holy God.

It is not suffering that is undeserved but God’s grace and mercy! “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). There has only been one person in all of history whose suffering was undeserved, and He suffered for us, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Our sufferings are not undeserved, but neither are they uncontrolled, for God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11). There are many good reasons why God permits a faithful Christian to suffer, but even if one cannot discern the particular reason at the time, he can at least “rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13). HMM

Tuesday, May 13

Righteous Friends

“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

The phrase “a man is known by the company he keeps” has been used in English-speaking countries since the 1500s. Not only is the saying biblically based, but it is easily observable in everyday life.

Friends shape friends. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). In our text above, James notes that the world’s friendship so contrasts with the heart and mind of God that such a friendship turns our relationship with God into enmity. The apostle John gives the clear reason: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

Friends love each other. “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you....I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you....These things I command you, that ye love one another” (John 15:14-17). This is pretty simple. If I love the Lord Jesus, and you love the Lord Jesus, then we will love each other—because we have a common friend!

Friends stick together. Because of our common love for the Lord Jesus, we do not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25). Neither do we follow the “counsel of the ungodly,” hang around “in the way of sinners,” or feel at home with “the scornful” (Psalm 1:1), because there is no fellowship in “righteousness with unrighteousness” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Godly people will have godly friends. HMM III

Invisible Qualities: Faithfulness

“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts 14:17)

The apostle Paul said, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). This teaches that anyone can clearly see some of God’s invisible qualities through His handiwork. As this handiwork principle pops up throughout Scripture, it offers at least two benefits.

For one, it encourages those who already know God as Savior. To know Him simply requires repentance from sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who made Himself “to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Lord paid sin’s required death penalty to become “the mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 12:24). These true spiritual teachings come from the same Word of God that teaches God created the whole world. Thus, believers find assurance in the congruence between what the Bible says about God’s work in creation and what the creation itself implies about the kind of Person who must have made it.

Today’s verse suggests a second benefit from this handiwork principle. Paul teaches that God has been the one responsible all along for supplying rain to produce the fruit that exactly meets both our need for nourishment and our desire for food’s flavors. What invisible qualities of God does this show? Certainly, one is His faithfulness.

He is faithful to supply even the needs of those who despise Him. In this and many other ways, the handiwork principle supplies us even as it did Paul with ways to introduce God to those who do not yet know Him. BDT

Thursday, May 15

Invisible Qualities: Transcendence

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” (Psalm 90:2)

Surely God’s transcendence is one of “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world [that are] clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

In this psalm, Moses offers high praise to the most high God. God transcends “the earth and the world” that He formed. This means that God both began this cosmos and keeps it running. His essence is not tied to the created order. He exists before and beyond it.

The New Testament agrees. As God, Jesus is “upholding all things by the word of his power,” “and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17). Stars, the earth, and our bodies all had a beginning. And they also decay toward death as “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22). Someone who transcends this Curse must be holding our finite world together. Scripture reveals the Lord Jesus as He who transcends all created things, does not change, and cannot fade away. What might this mean for each of us?

Paul wished that the Ephesian believers would “make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). How glorious that such a One would actually long for fellowship with cursed creatures like us! His very transcendence is just what we sinners need—someone to transcend our sin and restore our fellowship with Him. BDT

Friday, May 16

Invisible Qualities: Authority

“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)

As we consider that “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20), we may notice one of the key motivations for those who deny God’s handiwork in crafting our very bodies.

Our psalm says we did not make ourselves. In order to make yourself, you would have to exist before you came into existence. That violates basic logic. Likewise, the assertion that “it is he that hath made us” demands that something outside of us made us. Either nature gets credit or “the LORD,” here translated from *Jehovah*, which means self-existent or eternal. But nature itself is created. Therefore, God is our Creator, and if God made us, then we are His people, as today’s verse asserts. We should do what He says since He has that kind of authority.

His authority over us is one of those invisible attributes that are clearly seen, being understood by noticing how carefully He crafted our bodies, from speaking lips to fingertips.

What motivates us to suppress the truth of His rightful authority? Our unrighteousness does, not science or any experiment or observation. Indeed, what experiment has ever shown that nature can craft even the simplest biochemical from scratch, let alone a whole, integrated body?

On the other hand, if you “humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord,...he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). When we submit to the authority of our Creator, He “giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6-7). BDT

Saturday, May 17

The Tongue of the Learned

“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.” (Isaiah 50:4)

The prophetic words of our text were spoken by the Lord Jesus in the context of His suffering—“I gave my back to the smiters...I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (v. 6)—and His attentiveness to the will of His Father despite the suffering—“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (v. 5). The amazing love of Christ is seen in the fact that, in the midst of His intense personal pain, He could still continue, even on the cross, “to speak a word in season to him that is weary” as He comforted His mother, spoke salvation to the dying thief, and even sought forgiveness for His executioners.

In all this, He was “leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). How easy and natural it is to complain and rebel when we are suffering. We seek comfort and counsel from others when we (like our Exemplar) should be comforting others with “the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Though we cannot comprehend it fully, we must simply believe the mystery of the incarnation. God became man in Jesus Christ, and the omnipotent One “learned...obedience” (Hebrews 5:8). He was omniscient, yet somehow He “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52) as well as stature, and as He studied God’s Word, wakening “morning by morning,” He *learned* to hear the voice of the Father, thus receiving “the tongue of the learned,” that “gracious words” might proceed out of His mouth (Luke 4:22).

May the Lord grant each of His younger sons and daughters this gracious “tongue of the learned” as we, like His Firstborn, awaken each morning to hear His voice. HMM

Sunday, May 18

A Righteous Heart

“And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel.” (1 Kings 11:9)

The Scriptures have an interesting commentary on Solomon’s life: “When Solomon was old...his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God” (1 Kings 11:4). How is it possible to start well and end sadly?

We must guard our heart. “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life,” Solomon admonished in Proverbs 4:23. The Hebrew word for “keep” is *natsar* and the main verb for “guard” or “set a watch.” Psalm 119 uses *natsar* 10 times to demand our careful “watch” on our obedience and use of the Word of God. The promise is “Blessed are they that *keep* his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart” (Psalm 119:2).

Store the good treasure. In one of his many confrontations with the Pharisees, Jesus gave several illustrations about the impact of the “heart” part of our nature. Jesus spoke of binding the “strong man,” noting that a tree produces the fruit it was grown for and that snakes are always snakes. Then Jesus makes this observation: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Matthew 12:35).

Others will try to turn your heart. Jeroboam (1 Kings 11–12) led Israel in rebellion against Judah and against God. He “devised of his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33) liturgical practices that “made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 15:34). Peter warns, “Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (2 Peter 3:17).

We must guard our hearts, “for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). HMM III

Monday, May 19

Afraid to Understand

“For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.” (Mark 9:31-32)

When the Lord Jesus told His disciples about His coming death and resurrection, He could hardly have spoken more plainly, yet they “understood not.” Not willing to believe that He meant what He said (with all its uncomfortable implications for their own futures), they were “afraid to ask Him” what He meant, lest He confirm that His words should be taken literally.

This was not the only time. Again and again He told them that He would be crucified and then rise again, but they could not (or would not) understand. On one such occasion, Peter even rebuked Him and said, “Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” But the Lord answered, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Matthew 16:22-23). A refusal to take God’s Word literally, at least in this case, was said by Christ to be inspired by Satan!

Modern evangelical Christians do not doubt the reality of His sacrificial death and bodily resurrection, for the evidence is overwhelming, and these truths have become the glory and power of the gospel. Nevertheless, fearful reluctance to take God’s Word literally is still a great problem among some “Bible believers.” Whenever such a stand might become costly, many Christians eagerly accept nonliteral ways of interpreting Scripture to fit their own preferences. This approach, of course, is especially widespread in modern accommodations of the creation/Flood record of Genesis to the philosophies of modern evolutionary humanism. We should remember always that, just as in Christ’s predictions of His death and resurrection, God always means exactly what He says in His Word. HMM

Tuesday, May 20

The Righteous Man

“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.” (1 John 3:7)

There is an old spiritual song that has the phrase “ev’ry body talkin’ ‘bout heav’n ain’t goin’ there.” That’s a good summary statement of biblical truth—and worth repeating. As our text puts it, the righteous man does righteousness. But there is more to this principle.

A righteous man knows he is righteous. As a young man, King David was very conscious of his righteousness. David knew that he had “clean hands,” that he “kept the ways of the LORD,” and that he had neither “done wickedly” nor “departed” from God. David was also careful to put the “judgments” and the “statutes” of God out in front of his thoughts. “Therefore,” he said, “hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness” (Psalm 18:20-24).

A righteous man loves righteousness. The opening stanza of the majestic Psalm 119 makes this statement: “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways” (Psalm 119:2-3). The apostle John is even more succinct: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

A righteous man resolves to live righteously. “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way...I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person” (Psalm 101:2-4).

Those who long to be *with* God long to be *like* God.
HMM III

Wednesday, May 21

Our Sins in His Body

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

When Christ suffered on the cross for our sins, His entire body suffered. A vicious crown of thorns was pressed into His brow, and then “they smote him on the head” and “spit upon him” (Mark 15:17, 19). He already was weak and battered from Pilate’s dreaded scourging with the infamous Roman cat-o’-nine-tails (John 19:1).

Cruel spikes were driven into His hands and nails into His feet, suspending His pain-racked body from the cross (Psalm 22:16). The word “stripes” in our text actually appears in the singular. Christ on the cross was one big stripe, or wound. Finally, He died (v. 33) and “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34).

Indeed, He was bearing our sins in every last part of His body on the tree! The enormity of the necessary payment provides a partial measure of the enormity of our sins in the sight of a holy God. “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isaiah 1:5-6). “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:… Their feet are swift to shed blood:… There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:13, 15, 18).

But He bore all the sins of our body, and therefore we, in God’s sight, are dead to sins and alive to righteousness. “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). HMM

Thursday, May 22

The Victor's Crown

“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.” (1 Corinthians 9:25)

Ancient athletes who “strove for the mastery” devoted their whole lives to training and were “temperate in all things,” hoping thereby to receive the victor’s crown someday.

There are 21 references to the victor’s crown in the New Testament, in either the verb or noun form. In most of these, the crown is used as a symbol of the Christian’s “incorruptible” reward at the end of his spiritual race.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19, it is called a “crown of rejoicing,” speaking of the joy awaiting the faithful witness when he meets again with those he has influenced for Christ in this present life. Paul spoke of our “crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8) when we shall be “like him” (1 John 3:2), with our old sinful weaknesses and desires gone forever. Peter said it would be a “crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:4). James and John both said it is a wonderful “crown of life” (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10), that is, eternal life, in contrast to this present life of faithful submission to trials and persecution and possible death, for Christ’s sake.

The first four references to this victor’s crown, however, refer to the crown worn by Christ Himself. “Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!” (John 19:5).

Marvelous irony this, that a crown intended as an instrument of ridicule and pain would be transformed into a kingly crown of triumph! “But we see Jesus...crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). In the very suffering of death, He defeated death and sin and Satan himself, and His crown of thorns became a crown of eternal glory and universal honor. HMM

Friday, May 23

The Veil over the Nations

“And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.” (Isaiah 25:7)

Many people feel that every nation should be encouraged simply to practice its own religion. God’s Word, however, makes it plain that all nations are blinded, cut off from the truth by a deadly covering. This is true of the Jews, for “even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart” (2 Corinthians 3:15). It is also true of the Gentiles, who have “the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:18).

The veil that keeps them in such darkness is a Satanic blindfold. “The god of this world [i.e., Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Corinthians 4:4). And how did the devil ever gain such control over human minds? “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.... Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:21, 25).

So today men and women almost everywhere—atheists, Communists, humanists, Buddhists, Confucianists, animists, Hindus, Taoists, Shintoists, occultists, “New Agers,” and even many “liberals” in the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Islam, Christianity)—really all worship some man or man-exalting evolutionary philosophy and reject God as Creator.

Someday, God will destroy this pervasive veil over the nations. In the meantime, we must reach everyone we can with the true and everlasting gospel of Christ, for that “vail is done away in Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:14). HMM

Saturday, May 24

A Provoked Spirit

“They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.” (Psalm 106:32-33)

This terse passage summarizes the tragic events described in Numbers 20:1-13. If ever a religious leader had a right to be provoked with an ungrateful and complaining flock, Moses did. Finally, after years of privation in the wilderness, the people complained once too often, and Moses could take it no longer (or so he thought). In anger, he rebuked the rebels and smote the rock, disobeying God’s direction in how to miraculously provide water. As a result, God rebuked him, and he was not allowed to enter the promised land.

It is all too easy in times of pressure and inconsiderate selfishness all around us to rise up in “righteous indignation” and, like Moses, “spake unadvisedly with [our] lips.” This is surely one of Satan’s most common devices. Such verbal assaults may be well deserved and may seem to give personal satisfaction for a time, but they are usually counterproductive in the long run and very hurtful to one’s testimony for Christ to those so assaulted (imagine Peter trying to witness to Malchus after he had sliced off Malchus’ ear in anger!). Unfortunately, “the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8).

The Lord Jesus Himself is the ideal example in this difficult realm, for “he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). He could have called 10 legions of angels to destroy His tormentors, but instead He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Let us not be easily provoked to so-called righteous indignation. “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). HMM

Sunday, May 25

The Pillar and Ground of the Truth

“These things write I unto thee, hoping to come into thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”
(1 Timothy 3:14-15)

The church has been ordained by God to be the primary instrument through which His work on Earth is accomplished. Here Paul uses three phrases to describe three aspects of the church:

The house of God. The Christian family with husband, wife, and children performing their God-given roles provides a beautiful picture of the relationship of the church (the “bride” of Christ) to the Lord. The household of God consists of a family of believers where love abounds and He is honored. “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual *house*, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

The church of the living God. The *ekklesia*, or “called-out ones,” serve the living God. “The blood of Christ [shall]... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14).

The pillar and ground of the truth. A facade pillar of a building is not used for support but rather for display by elevating or calling attention to something else. The *ground* provides the support. The church should function to support and display the whole truth in such a way that all people can see and believe it.

The church should be a family of believers exhibiting brotherly love, individually and corporately serving the living God out of a pure conscience, defending the truth, and displaying it to the lost. May each of us as church members enjoy and support such a church. JDM

Monday, May 26

Pilgrims on the Earth

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.” (Hebrews 11:13-14)

This is the heart-touching testimony of the great “heroes of faith” of Hebrews 11. The experiences of all these godly men and women of the past are outlined as an example for us as we pass through the years of our own “pilgrimage” on the earth. “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us...run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

There is another group who also gave their own lives, and the testimony of our text seems appropriate for them as well. Once a year, on Memorial Day, we remember in a special way those who died in defense of our own country. They had seen its promises and embraced them and were willing to die for them. Many of those were also Christians, and they loved their country, especially because of its unique Christian heritage and its freedom to practice and propagate their faith.

One of these was this writer’s younger brother, who died in the jungles of Burma as a young pilot flying the famous “Hump” into China during World War II. Before his death, he had given a faithful Christian witness to many of his buddies as he ran his own race with patience. Many readers of these lines no doubt remember their own friends and loved ones who likewise offered up their lives for God and country.

As we remember them, we surely must remember, with even greater love and appreciation, the One who made the greatest sacrifice of all, “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). HMM

Tuesday, May 27

Nine Forty-Day Periods

“To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”
(Acts 1:3)

It is interesting how often the Scriptures refer to a 40-day period. There are nine different 40-day periods noted in Scripture (the phrase itself occurs 17 times), and it may be noteworthy that 40 days is one-ninth of the original (and prophetic) lunar/solar year of 360 days (note Genesis 7:11; 8:3-4; Revelation 11:2-3). Thus, the total of the nine 40-day periods equals the lunar/solar year.

These nine 40-day periods are as follows: (1) the intense rainfall at the start of the Flood (Genesis 7:12, 17); (2) the first giving of the law (Exodus 24:18; Deuteronomy 9:9, 11); (3) the second giving of the law (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:18, 25); (4) the searching of Canaan by the fearful spies (Numbers 13:25; 14:34); (5) the defiance of Israel by Goliath (1 Samuel 17:16); (6) Elijah’s journey to Horeb (1 Kings 19:8); (7) Jonah’s reluctant preaching in Nineveh (Jonah 3:4); (8) Christ’s temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2); (9) Christ’s post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3).

Each of these periods was a time of great stress and intense testing for one or more of God’s people, except the last. Instead, the final 40-day period, encompassing Christ’s ministry to His disciples after His resurrection, was a time of triumph and great blessing. He had come victoriously through the most intense time of stress and testing that anyone could ever experience, and now He could show Himself alive eternally to His disciples and promise them the same victory. Forty days of testing, then 40 days of triumph! Even a lifetime of testing is more than balanced by an eternity of blessing. HMM

Wednesday, May 28

The Good Pastor

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” (John 10:14)

The Greek word used here for “shepherd” is the same as for “pastor.” The Lord Jesus, therefore, was saying, in effect: “I am the good pastor: the good pastor giveth his life for the sheep [that is, ‘for His flock’].” A good pastor is, thus, one who leads his flock into good pasture, who knows his flock, and who is known by his flock. A good pastor would even give his life for his flock (vv. 1-16).

However, this is not merely a term for the leader of a church congregation. The term and the concept are sufficiently broad to include all those individuals (teachers, military officers, parents, etc.) who have leadership responsibilities.

In all such cases, our guide and example is our good shepherd, our good pastor, our good leader—the Lord Jesus Christ. With this in mind, consider some of the other biblical references to our good shepherd: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Note also Hebrews 13:20-21: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever.”

Almost every Christian, at least on occasion, must assume the function of a spiritual shepherd, and every Christian, always, is spiritually a sheep. The Lord Jesus is our good shepherd, and we do well to follow Him in all things. HMM

Thursday, May 29

The Crucial Point

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (Galatians 6:14)

Whenever people speak of “the crucial point of the issue” or “the crux of the matter,” they are inadvertently acknowledging the centrality of the cross of Christ, for these words are derived from the Latin *crux*, meaning “a cross.”

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is right at the very heart of Christianity and also at the very heart of the opposition to Christianity. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

It was at the cross, and on the cross, that Christ defeated Satan. “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:14-15).

And it is at the cross that we also must be crucified, spiritually, if Satan is to be defeated in our own lives. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24). “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6).

Crucifixion, of course, is exceedingly painful, and therefore there is a very real “offence of the cross” (Galatians 5:11). Many Christians resist the demands on the life, mind, and body that are entailed in such total identification with Christ. They would rather glory in earthly things. But how much better it is to glory, as Paul did, only in the cross, crucified unto the world. HMM

Friday, May 30

The Eternal Cosmos

“He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.” (Psalm 148:6)

In this central psalm of the last five psalms comprising the “Hallelujah” epilogue to the book of Psalms, the entire physical creation is exhorted to praise the Lord as all the universe is restored to its primeval perfection. All the people of the earth, all the angels, even all the animals, will praise the Lord.

Furthermore, in some way that can only be understood by faith, the entire inorganic creation—sun, moon, stars, mountains, winds, everything—will be able to praise Him. Even the primeval waters above the heavens (Genesis 1:7-9) will have been restored, and *they* will praise the Lord (Psalm 148:4-5).

And all of this will continue forever and ever! The new heavens and new Earth—that is, the *renewed* heavens and Earth, with the Curse removed (Revelation 22:3)—the sun and moon and stars, with the eternal throne of the Lord Jesus established on the earth in the New Jerusalem in the midst of all the redeemed men and women of all the ages, will forever be a praise to God.

God is not capricious, and He does not fail. He will not “uncreate” what He has created. “Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). The earth must yet be purged by fire (2 Peter 3:10), but it will be renewed in righteousness (v. 13) and without any evidences of the former regime of decay and death.

And then it will last forever. “And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever” (Psalm 78:69). “[God] laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever” (Psalm 104:5). “And they that turn many to righteousness [shall shine] as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). HMM

Saturday, May 31

Righteous Boldness

“The righteous are bold as a lion.” (Proverbs 28:1)

A holy boldness is imparted to those who seek to speak the truth of God (Acts 4:31). The miracle of the Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit was followed by several incidents where the various apostles and early Christian leaders spoke “boldly in the Lord” (Acts 14:3). Where does this boldness come from?

The Presence of the Holy Spirit. The Sanhedrin “saw the boldness of Peter and John” when they were dragged before them (Acts 4:13) after they had healed the lame man shortly after Pentecost. Peter was “filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 4:8) and boldly answered the farcical questioning of those self-righteous leaders, and they “took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). When we speak with God’s authority, we speak boldly.

The Words of God’s Word. The first church prayed “that with all boldness they may speak thy word,” and they were enabled to speak “the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:29, 31). When Paul was starting the church in Ephesus, he “spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). We should have boldness when we have opportunity to “make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19).

The Assurance of a Righteous Life. “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:20). Several godly traits of righteous men are given in Hebrews, “so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6).

These are from where that boldness comes. HMM III



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