

Days of Praise



December 2016 • January • February 2017

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

December 2016 • January • February 2017

*“Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost
of heaven, who hath gendered it?”
(Job 38:29)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

*“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”
(2 Corinthians 4:17-18)*

Dear Christian friend,

By the time we finish reading through this quarter’s devotional thoughts, our country will have seated an entirely new House of Representatives, a significantly changed Senate, and a new United States of America president and vice president. This moment in history, we are reminded by Scripture, is but a “light affliction,” and we should be aware that our Lord Jesus is still the Sovereign of Romans 13 who is working out a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” for us.

I know I share the desire of all our authors that these devotional themes will help you “see” the things that are “not seen” and increase your sight to grasp the eternal reality of what our God is preparing for us. Those “invisible things” are best seen “by the things that are made” (Romans 1:20), training us to see our Creator’s hand working actively among us and exerting His will in everything.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

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Thursday, December 1

Love from the Beginning

“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” (1 John 3:11)

The pungent phrase “from the beginning” occurs no less than nine times in the first three chapters of the little epistle of 1 John. Thus, while in one sense, Christ’s command to love one another was a new commandment, in another sense it has been with us from the very beginning of the world. “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning” (1 John 2:7).

The first verses of John’s epistle show that this beginning is the same beginning in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1: “That which was from the beginning, . . . of the Word of life; . . . that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us” (1 John 1:1-2). Note also 1 John 2:13: “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning” (see also 1 John 2:14).

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father” (1 John 2:24). This is an eternal commandment, for “God is love” (1 John 4:16) and “love is of God” (1 John 4:7). In the upper room, Jesus prayed to the Father: “Father . . . thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. . . . And I have declared unto them thy name, . . . that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them” (John 17:24, 26).

Love, therefore, has been at the center of God’s plan from the beginning, but a new pattern and measure of that love was given us by Christ. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). HMM

Help Me, O Lord

“Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy: That they may know that this is thy hand; that thou, LORD, hast done it.” (Psalm 109:26-27)

There is disagreement as to the proper interpretation of this psalm of David. Its center section (vv. 6-20) consists of a strong denunciation and curse, while the beginning and ending sections petition God for judgment and deliverance (vv. 1-5, 21-31).

Most hold that David is speaking in both sections. If so, it is a bitter and vindictive spirit finding vent. “Let Satan stand at his right hand. . . . let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few. . . . Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: . . . Let the extortioner catch all that he hath. . . . Let there be none to extend mercy unto him” (vv. 6-12).

Others would claim that David is quoting the curse of his enemy directed toward him and point to the use of the singular personal pronouns “he,” “his,” and “him” used 30 times in 15 verses. Indeed, if this is the proper interpretation, the psalm becomes the plea of a persecuted man of God who entrusts his enemies’ judgment entirely to the Lord. “But do thou for me, Oh GOD the Lord, for thy name’s sake: because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. . . . I became also a reproach unto them. . . . Let them curse. . . . I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yea, I will praise him among the multitude. For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul” (Psalm 109:21-22, 25, 28, 30-31).

Like his master who had come after him, “when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). JDM

Saturday, December 3

God's Shining Face

"The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." (Numbers 6:25)

This request is part of the well-known Mosaic benediction for the children of Israel (Numbers 6:24-27). The first occurrence in verb form of the word "shine" is in this verse, although in the noun form, translated as "light," it appears in the third verse of the Bible when God said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3).

True light comes only from God, since "God is light" (1 John 1:5). As the world depends on the sunshine for its physical life, so we continually must receive the Son's shining in our hearts to sustain our spiritual life.

It is noteworthy that the prayer of our text occurs seven other times in the Scriptures. These are as follows:

"Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake" (Psalm 31:16); "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah" (Psalm 67:1); "Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (Psalm 80:19; also vv. 3, 7); "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes" (Psalm 119:135); "O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake" (Daniel 9:17).

Since God, in His omnipotence, dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Timothy 6:16), He shines on us for salvation, spiritual illumination, and daily guidance only through His Son, the Word made flesh, for "in him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). HMM

Salvation vs. Assurance of Salvation

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” (1 John 2:5)

The New Testament is emphatically clear that we are saved entirely by the grace of God through faith in Christ. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; . . . it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

But how can we know for sure that our professed faith in Christ is genuine and we are really saved? Many who claim to be Christians are not truly saved, for Christ said: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Now, note that John’s main purpose in writing his gospel was to win people to saving faith in Christ. “These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). Then the ultimate purpose of his first epistle was to assure them they were saved. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

His epistle, in fact, gives us several tests to prove our faith. One is in our text—we keep (literally “guard against loss”) His Word. Also: “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). Then: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14).

Thus, we can not only have salvation, but also assurance of salvation if we love and guard His Word, seek to keep His commandments, and love all others of like precious faith. Finally, we have the indwelling witness of the Spirit. “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24). HMM

Monday, December 5

The Christian's Position

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” (Ephesians 1:4)

The search for identity and meaning can drive one to great successes or tragic failures. For the Christian, however, the question is answered throughout Ephesians.

We are chosen! We are selected as a favorite out of “many [who] are called” (Matthew 22:14) “out of the world” (John 15:19). What a privilege! We are God’s choice to bear His name, represent His cause, and share His glory throughout eternity.

In fact, we are “predestinated [previous boundaries set] . . . unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (Ephesians 1:5). And “if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

Furthermore, we have been “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). That word, “accepted,” is a specialized form of the word most often translated “grace.” We have been “graced” by almighty God, who has set absolute boundaries around our lives and made us His children. We were purchased “through his blood” (v. 7) “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar [that is, ‘precious’] people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

Moreover, we are forgiven (Ephesians 1:7)! Our sins are “covered” (Psalm 32:1); “cast” behind God’s back (Isaiah 38:17); removed “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12); “remember[ed] . . . no more” (Jeremiah 31:34); and cleansed “from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Hallelujah! Since we are God’s children, we should have no identity crisis. We are a chosen, predestined, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, and holy people. Finally, we are predestined “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). HMM III

The Christian's Purpose

“According as he hath chosen us in him . . . that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” (Ephesians 1:4)

In the grand purpose of our “selection” into God’s family, two key words are used:

“Holy” (Greek *hagios*) stresses dedication. A holy man or woman is distinctively God’s, set apart for God’s use, separated from the secular, and consecrated to God’s service. All who are “chosen” are chosen to be holy.

The Colossian Christians were told to “mortify” the physical appetites, to “put off” their sinful mental attitudes and habits, and to “put on the new man . . . as the elect of God, holy and beloved” (Colossians 3:5-12). The focus is character.

“Without blame” refers to our reputations. This character will only be fully realized in heaven (1 Corinthians 1:8), but there is a present responsibility to “present your bodies a living sacrifice. . . . And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1-2).

The character of holiness will become the cause of a lifestyle of blamelessness. We are to be the “sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

This holy and blameless condition will result in “the praise of the glory of his grace” (Ephesians 1:6), where God will someday “gather together in one all things in Christ” (v. 10).

What a magnificent thought! The purpose for which we have been chosen, predestined, redeemed, and forgiven is to be holy in character and blameless in reputation, so that when God gathers us all together in Christ, we will be the praise of the glorious grace of God! HMM III

Wednesday, December 7

The Christian's Prosperity

“God and Father . . . who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:3)

Given our high position in Christ, it follows that God would provide whatever is necessary to accomplish His purposes in and for us.

The Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12 provide a good illustration. Each blessing is designed to meet a need or fulfill a desire of God's chosen (Ephesians 1:4). The poor, meek, and persecuted are given ownership in the Kingdom. The mournful are given God's special comfort. Those who hunger for righteousness are filled. The merciful will obtain mercy, the pure in heart will see God, and the peacemakers are identified as God's children. The longings of our souls and characters are all met by God.

The practical needs of “wisdom and prudence” are met, too (v. 8). Wisdom is knowledge focused toward useful application, and prudence is the ability to develop successful activities based on wisdom. The Word of God is the source of wisdom (Deuteronomy 4:1-6; Proverbs 1:1-6) and is inspired of God to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Furthermore, He has “made known unto us the mystery of his will” (Ephesians 1:9). “Kept secret” in the days of the Old Testament prophets (Romans 16:25-26), it is now made clear to us so that we can show “unto the principalities and powers . . . by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:10). These spiritual resources are available for every believer “to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:7). We must pray that we do not waste these resources like the “wicked and slothful” servant in the parables of the talents and the pounds (Matthew 25:26; Luke 19:22). HMM III

The Christian's Permission

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

The high priest of Israel wore the inscription "holiness to the LORD" to illustrate to all who obeyed God that they were "accepted before the LORD" (Exodus 28:36-38). Joshua, as a type of all believers, was granted "places to walk" in the courts of God (Zechariah 3:7). Christ's disciples were commanded to "ask" the Father for "whatsoever," since they were chosen and ordained to "bring forth fruit" (John 15:16). We have permission to "ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

But there is more! Not only are we accepted, we are "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13), an "earnest [down payment, deposit] of our inheritance" (v. 14). We are "stabilishe[d] . . . anointed . . . sealed" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

We are "confirmed" in everything (1 Corinthians 1:4-8), consecrated and sanctified to serve (Exodus 28:41; 1 John 2:27), and given the "earnest of the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 5:5) to empower our ministry.

The Holy Spirit does His work through a threefold ministry in our lives. He will work on Christ's behalf, through our witness, to bring conviction to those not yet in Christ (John 16:7-11). He will also minister to us as the teacher of our spirits to guide us into all truth (John 16:13; 14:17, 26; 15:26).

Furthermore, the wisdom, prudence, and knowledge of God are revealed to us through His work in us (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). All that is necessary for our "effectual working" (Ephesians 3:7) is "graced" to us so that we can "work out [our] salvation" (Philippians 2:12). We are "complete in him" (Colossians 2:10). HMM III

Friday, December 9

The Christian's Possibilities

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . May give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened.”
(Ephesians 1:17-18)

The “spirit of wisdom” is applied to a wide variety of circumstances. It certainly includes leadership (Deuteronomy 34:9).

But wisdom is also identified with the ability to make beautiful clothing (Exodus 28:3) and to engineer and invent complex equipment (31:2-6). Daniel was said to have “an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts” (Daniel 5:12). We are even promised that our “adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:15).

A “spirit of revelation” is also made available to us. This revelation (literally “to take off the cover”) is not new doctrine or truth. Revelation is implemented by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10), having the source of His revelatory work from Jesus Christ on behalf of Christ (John 16:13-15).

The Greek language of the phrase “the eyes of [our] understanding being enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18) could be translated “the vision of your deep thought will be made to shine,” or paraphrased in a more colloquial expression, “the light comes on!”

There are three specific enlightenments cited here: The hope of our calling (see Romans 15:13-14), the riches of the glory of our inheritance (11:33-36), and the exceeding greatness of His power exercised on our behalf (Ephesians 3:20; 6:10).

Each of these three are specifically designed by God to undergird our faith and embolden our confidence, even though we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).
HMM III

Saturday, December 10

The Christian's Power

“And . . . the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.” (Ephesians 1:19)

The power of the triune Creator, as displayed in the resurrection of Christ, is directed toward us! We can be certain that we will never fully comprehend that, but the Scriptures provide several clear statements that will help us get some usable grasp on this resource:

1) We receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on us (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit indwells every believer (John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 6:19) and is therefore readily accessible to all believers (Ephesians 3:20).

2) We use the power of God every time we preach the gospel (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18), whether to one person or to thousands.

3) We learn of the power of God through “great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:3-4). Indeed, those promises involve “all things that pertain to life and godliness.”

4) We see the results of the power of God in our lives when our characters reflect “all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Colossians 1:11).

The Lord desires “that [we] might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19) and “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (v. 16). The purpose of this empowering is to be “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith” (Colossians 2:7), “able to comprehend . . . the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Ephesians 3:18-19).

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (vv. 20-21). HMM III

Sunday, December 11

The Christian's Parentage

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1)

There are three descriptions of what we were prior to God's work in us, as described in the second chapter of Ephesians and as listed below. We were “dead in trespasses [activities] and sins [character, attitude, condition].” The result was that we were unable to understand or seek God on our own (Romans 3:10-11). Nor are we able to know the “things of God” by our own intellectual prowess (1 Corinthians 2:14). “We walked according to the course of this world” (Ephesians 2:2) in “bondage” to the world (Galatians 4:3) and with the eyes of our minds “blinded” by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4). We are “by nature the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). Both our natural desires (5:5-6) and our willful unbelief (John 3:36) have placed us under the ever-increasing wrathful judgment of God (Romans 2:5-9).

The transformation performed by God on us can only be “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:10). It involves God's rich “mercy” and “great love” (v. 4) to make us alive when we were dead (see John 5:21-24; Romans 6:4-6, 9-11).

That power “raises” us and “seats” us with God positionally in the heavens (Ephesians 2:6). That grace is effected through faith, and even “that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (vv. 8-9).

Whatever all of these promises may ultimately involve, they assure us of permanent status as the chosen, holy ones of God (Romans 8:29-39), “that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). HMM III

Monday, December 12

The Christian's Partnership

*“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”
(Ephesians 2:19)*

Prior to salvation, we are called “aliens . . . and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” But now we are part of the “new man” and the grand partnership that has been made possible between Jew and Gentile, Old and New Covenant saints, and the operative impact and purpose of the “household of God” (v. 12-13, 15, 19).

We are “made nigh” and made “one.” The enemy has been abolished, with the “middle wall of partition” that was between us broken down (vv. 13-15), making us “one body” with common “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (vv. 16-18).

Therefore, we are “fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God . . . built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”; “fitly framed,” growing unto a “holy temple . . . for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (vv. 19-22). Now displayed in a fellowship of past and present, bond and free, male and female—all new “partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (3:1-6; Galatians 3:22-29).

And God has “created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 9-11).

God has designed His salvation for us in such a way that we cannot fail to achieve His plans for us! We should humbly thank Him for what He has accomplished in us through Christ Jesus. HMM III

Tuesday, December 13

The Name of David

“Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.” (2 Samuel 23:1-2)

The name of David is uniquely important in Scripture. Except for the name of Jesus Christ Himself (of whom David is a remarkable type), no other name (not even Abraham or Moses or Paul) occurs nearly so often in the Bible. In the New Testament—again, other than Jesus Christ—David’s name is both the first mentioned (Matthew 1:1) and the last mentioned (Revelation 22:16).

As the “sweet psalmist of Israel,” David was largely responsible for this longest book in the Bible. As we see in our text, his claim to divine inspiration in the writing of his psalms is perhaps the most meaningful and clear-cut statement on this subject by any of the biblical authors. It was both “God’s Spirit” and “me” who spoke, giving “his word” through “my tongue,” said David in his last words shortly before he died.

David was not a perfect man. We remember his grievous sin, not only against Uriah the Hittite, but even more against the Lord (2 Samuel 12:9-14), thus giving “great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme.”

He had to suffer greatly because of this, but his repentance was genuine, and he was graciously restored by God to fellowship and service. The Lord’s own testimony concerning him was this: “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will” (Acts 13:22).

It is little wonder that so many loving parents over the many centuries—both Jews and Gentiles—have named their own sons David, for the very name means “beloved.” HMM

Wednesday, December 14

Let Him Hear

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Matthew 11:15)

The Lord Jesus Christ must have considered this exhortation to be of great importance, for it appears eight times in the four gospels and seven times in Revelation, all as spoken by Christ Himself—as well as one more time apparently uttered by John (Revelation 13:9). It is urgent, therefore, that people not just “hear” God’s Word with their ears (“in one ear and out the other,” as the saying goes), but really *hear* it, with understanding minds and believing hearts and obedient lives.

It is most important, first of all, for unsaved men and women to respond to the gospel message in this way. Jesus said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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). Hearing this message with believing minds and hearts means all the difference between heaven and hell.

But that’s just the beginning. Jesus also said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (10:27-28). He not only promised us everlasting life when we first heard His voice, but also assures us that this life is truly everlasting and can never be taken away from us, as we continue to hear His voice in His Word.

Not only everlasting life, but resurrection life! “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth.” “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise. . . : and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). He that hath ears, let him hear! HMM

Thursday, December 15

The Carnal Mind and Death

“To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” (Romans 8:6-7)

This passage defines for us both the carnal mind and the spiritual mind, not with formal definitions, but by giving equivalent terms.

First, the carnal mind is identified as being “enmity against God” (v. 7), a rampant disregard for God’s law. Furthermore, the carnal mind is equated with death, specifically eternal, spiritual death. A physically living person may have a carnal mind, bringing with it a spiritual deadness and eternal doom. This also serves us as a working definition of death—being hostile toward God, or minding the things of the flesh. “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (vv. 8-9).

Next, we see that the spiritual mind is “life and peace” (v. 6)—a supreme preference for God and subjection to His will. This state not only leads to eternal life but *is* life, along with peace, even now. There can be no peace for the carnally minded.

Some would wrongly teach that the physical death of the unbeliever leads to the total annihilation of his body, soul, and spirit. However, this passage teaches that the minding of “the things of the flesh” (v. 5) does not only lead to ultimate physical death, but is death right now.

Death is not the extinction of being but the alienation of that being from Christ. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (v. 13). “If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (v. 10). JDM

Friday, December 16

Paul and Titus

“To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (Titus 1:4)

On the surface, this verse might be considered insignificant and could easily be missed, for it is part of a lengthy greeting to Titus by Paul at the beginning of this very practical book. However, many nuggets are contained therein, and it is well worth our study.

Titus was one of Paul’s most trusted companions. He was a faithful worker who had accompanied Paul on a number of his journeys. Late in Paul’s life, after years of discipleship, Paul asked Titus to carry on the work he had started in Crete, an island well known for its deplorable moral state. Paul may have been instrumental in Titus’ initial conversion, for he calls him “mine own son,” literally “my true child,” a very endearing term. The bond of “common faith” gave them a mutual goal, and, of course, it is the same faith that we share today.

Paul greets Titus with “grace, mercy, and peace.” Grace is a manifestation of God’s love toward undeserving rebels, resulting in forgiveness and blessing. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Mercy is the attitude of God toward those who are in distress. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Peace comes as a result of the restoration of harmony between God and the forgiven one. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

This threefold blessing comes from both “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.” What a comfort to recognize both Father and Son as involved in the bestowment of all aspects of our salvation. JDM

Saturday, December 17

Little Children

“And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:2-3)

Many adult Christians have the mistaken notion that little children are too young to understand the gospel and so should not be allowed to decide for Christ until they are much older. The problem, however, is not the children; it is the adults who find it hard to understand! They must become like little children before they can really comprehend the way of salvation and be converted. Jesus said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. . . . Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:16-17).

After all, what is there to understand? A very young child, instructed in the Scriptures from infancy as God has commanded his parents (note 2 Timothy 3:15, which uses the Greek word for “baby” as the state in which young Timothy began to know the Bible), can surely comprehend that the God to whom his parents pray made him, that he has sinned against God when he does wrong, that God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for his sins, and that Jesus can save him and take him to heaven. An adult may require much explanation and may imagine many difficulties, but a child will simply believe—and that’s enough!

The word for “little child” or “little children” actually means children who are not much more than toddlers. It is the same word rendered “young child” when the wise men came to find Jesus in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:8, etc.). Little children should, by all means, be taught the gospel and should be encouraged to come to Christ before they grow too old to understand with their hearts! HMM

Sunday, December 18

The Beginning of Wisdom

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.” (Psalm 111:10)

This age has rightly been called the “age of information.” With multitudes of books and periodicals in every field of study and practice, with billions of dollars devoted to all kinds of research, and now even the “information superhighway” of the Internet. It seems everyone and every organization is posting information of some sort on its own website and email. The world is almost drowning in information.

“But where shall wisdom be found and where is the place of understanding?” (Job 28:12). Job’s urgent question can never be answered online, but only in an ancient book. “Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28).

This spiritual truism is found often in that Book. King Solomon, to whom God had granted special wisdom (1 Kings 3:11-12), penned divinely inspired words when he wrote: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,” and then “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10).

If anything is missing in our information age, it is surely the fear of God, at least among most people—even most religious people. But, as our text says: “A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.”

From our New Testament perspective, we now know that “in [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23). Herein is true knowledge and understanding and wisdom.
HMM

Monday, December 19

Faith, Self Defined

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.” (Hebrews 11:13)

Some have struggled with the word “faith,” desiring a succinct definition of it, but nowhere in Scripture does a working definition of faith appear. In places, however, the Bible gives a rather indirect definition of faith. Keeping in mind that the words “belief” and “faith” are translations of the same Greek word, let us look at several such texts.

Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, said of Mary, “And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:45).

Paul knew that God intended for him to be brought before Caesar and encouraged his shipmates as they were about to be shipwrecked with the words: “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25).

Speaking of Abraham’s faith that God would give him a son, Paul says that “he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Romans 4:20-21).

Of Sarah, Abraham’s wife, it is said, “Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11).

These verses and the verse in our text give us a working definition of faith. It is, therefore, a firm belief, a conviction, a judgment that God is both capable and faithful to perform what He has promised and that there will be such a performance. This kind of faith brings the future into present reality. JDM

Tuesday, December 20

Justified—by Faith or Works?

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)

Some have argued that James contradicts Paul at this point, since James emphasized that both Abraham and Rahab, among others, were justified by works (James 2:21, 25). In fact, this seeming conflict between Paul and James has often been cited as one of the “contradictions” of the Bible.

There is no contradiction, however. Neither Abraham nor Rahab could have been justified by the “works of the law,” and James never said they were. Abraham lived before God even gave the law to Moses, and Rahab lived in a pagan culture that knew nothing about it. Furthermore, James himself knew that no one could really be saved by the law, for he said that “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

Actually, both Abraham and Rahab were “justified”—which means “seen as righteous”—by faith in God and His provision of salvation (James 2:23; Hebrews 11:31). The righteousness of Christ, who perfectly kept the law of God, is imputed to believers by faith (Romans 4:3-5). God sees him or her as “in Christ,” and so they are justified (recognized as righteous) solely through faith.

However, other men cannot see our faith, and therefore we must be justified in their sight by our works. True saving faith inevitably will manifest itself in works of righteousness. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift 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 2:8, 10). HMM

Wednesday, December 21

Morning Prayer

“Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee.” (Psalm 143:8)

This is a beautiful and meaningful prayer with which to start the day, and one that God must delight to answer. It is very simple, with two requests and two declarations, yet it can reach the very heart of God.

Because we trust implicitly in His Word, we hear Him speak through it as we read it at the beginning of the day. And as we hear Him speak, we rejoice again in His lovingkindness, especially in saving our souls and guiding our ways.

Then we are emboldened once again to lift up our very souls to Him (not just our voices!) and ask Him for clear guidance in the way in which we should walk today.

The psalmist also prays, and so should we: “Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Psalm 143:10). God will “cause [us] to know the way wherein [we] should walk” by the Holy Spirit if we sincerely desire to know and to follow His will and to be led in the paths of righteousness. He will never lead us, of course, in any path contrary to His revealed Word. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105).

But when He is given all priority in our lives, when we love and study and obey His Word, and when we sincerely call on Him for daily guidance in His will, He will surely answer. “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6). “This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15). HMM

Sorrow According to God

“And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31-32)

In one of the most important passages in the New Testament regarding repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9-11), Paul uses essentially the same phrase three times to express what he means by repentance: He rejoices that the Corinthian believers were made “sorry after a godly manner” (v. 9), calls it a “godly sorrow” (v. 10), claiming that they “sorrowed after a godly sort” (v. 11). This phrase could literally be translated “sorrow according to God,” which leads to repentance. Such sorrow is contrasted to the “sorrow of the world [that] worketh death” (v. 10), which is a mere regret of consequences or remorse of conscience, which does not yield repentance but only despair and possibly suicide. “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation” (v. 10).

Just as godly sorrow leads to repentance, so should the blessings of God. “Despise thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). God desires repentance on the part of the sinning one and is free to use whatever vehicle He chooses to bring it about.

True repentance involves a recognition of sin as a crime against God and a violation of His holy nature. Our recognition of this fact brings godly sorrow that leads inevitably to a change of mindset toward the sin and a confession of it as sin (1 John 1:9), and this brings forgiveness from God.

Christ taught that this “sorrow according to God” brings great joy elsewhere in the universe: “Likewise, I say unto you there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10). JDM

Friday, December 23

The Peace of Christ

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

The peace of Christ is not the peace of the world. If history is any criterion, the search for world peace always will be futile, for there have been wars going on somewhere in the world practically every day throughout history.

But even if world leaders could bring peace to the world, it would not be true peace. “My peace,” said Jesus, “is not as the world giveth.” Peace is internal, not external. “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” (James 4:1).

The true Christian will never be left at peace in the world, even when there are brief respites of peace between the nations of the world. Only in Christ is there real peace. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

The Lord Jesus Christ alone can give true peace, for only “he is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14). He is the true peacemaker, for He “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). Before there can ever be genuine peace between man and man on Earth, there must be peace between man on Earth and God in heaven.

Once a person has been “justified by faith,” however, he has eternal “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Then, for daily peace, he can simply appropriate this truth in his life. “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). HMM

The Babe in Bethlehem

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet 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)

This is a very remarkable prophecy, explicitly predicting that the future King of Israel would be born in the little village of Bethlehem some 700 years before He finally came. Then, to assure its fulfillment, the great Emperor Augustus had to decree a comprehensive census, compelling Joseph to take Mary with him to Bethlehem for her child to be born.

That the prophecy involves an actual birth is clear, not only from the phrase “come forth,” but also from the succeeding verse that warns God will “give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth” (v. 3). The preceding verse had also predicted that “they shall smite [this coming ruler] the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (v. 1), speaking of His initial rejection and execution.

But the prophecy not only foresees His birth in Bethlehem, His repudiation by His own people, and His eventual installation as King over all Israel (not merely Judah), but also that this same remarkable person was none other than God Himself! His “goings forth” had been “from everlasting.” That is, He is eternally proceeding forth from His Father. He did not become God’s Son when He was born in Bethlehem; He has been coming forth eternally.

There is still another truth implied in the Hebrew word for “goings forth.” It is also used for such things as the flowing of water from a fountain or the radiations from the sun. Thus, the never-ending flowing forth of power from God through the Son is nothing less than the sustaining energy for the whole creation, as He is “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). And this was the Babe in Bethlehem! HMM

Sunday, December 25

The Gifts of the Wise Men

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.”
(Matthew 2:11)

These wise men (or Magi) were of great eminence in the Parthian Empire at that time, and it is unlikely that the caravan from the East consisted of only three men. They more likely had a large entourage as they came searching for the future King of Israel, so it was small wonder that “all Jerusalem” was “troubled,” along with King Herod (Matthew 2:3). The Parthians (i.e., Persians) had never been conquered by the Romans and at that very time were posing a significant threat along the eastern boundary of the extended Roman Empire.

When they found the young child and His mother in Bethlehem, the Magi “fell down, and worshipped him” (Matthew 2:11). But why did they offer Him just three gifts—and why these three gifts? Somehow they seemed to have sensed, possibly from meditating deeply on the ancient prophecies of Balaam (Numbers 24:17), Daniel (in Daniel 9:24-26), and David concerning the priesthood order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4), that this young child whose birth had been announced by a star was destined not only to be the King but would also become the Messianic Sacrifice to “make reconciliation for iniquity” (see Daniel 9:24, 26) and then eventually become our eternal High Priest who “ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Thus, the gold would acknowledge His right to reign, the frankincense would speak of the incense to be offered in the heavenly tabernacle, and the myrrh (John 19:39) would testify that His crucified body would be so anointed as it entered the tomb for a very temporary burial. HMM

The Goal of Teaching

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”
(1 Timothy 1:5)

As Paul begins his instruction to his disciple Timothy, his “own son in the faith” (v. 2), he warns him about false doctrine (v. 3) and petty, fruitless arguments (v. 4). He contrasts such false teaching with his own teaching, the goal or “end” of which is threefold:

First, Paul would like to see his ministry produce “charity [i.e., *agape* love] out of a pure heart.” This is God’s kind of love that He has bestowed upon us, undeserving as we are. Once He has purified our hearts and taken up residence there through the power of His Spirit, we can love with such a love.

Second, proper teaching should lead us to “a good conscience.” Our lives must be free of unconfessed sin and uncluttered by wrongs not made right with others. The false teachings and improper attitudes and actions Paul is condemning (vv. 3-4) frequently lead to strife and fabrications. The response to these must be strong, yet proper.

Third, “unfeigned faith,” a sincere faith without hypocrisy, should result. It must be our own faith and not that of others, not even family members (2 Timothy 1:5). We have a reasonable faith shored up by a great weight of evidence and logic, and proper teaching should strengthen and confirm it.

May God continue to gift the church with godly teachers like Timothy, “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13). JDM

Tuesday, December 27

The Lord Will Provide

“And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.” (Genesis 22:14)

Abraham had just passed the most severe of tests. He had been willing to offer up his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord. He must have wondered why God had asked him to slay the son of promise, through whom many descendants were promised, but he didn't refuse or even question God. He was convinced that “God was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead” (Hebrews 11:19). Yet, he must have been greatly relieved when God stopped him from slaying his son, and thankful indeed when he found that God had already provided a ram to be used as “a burnt offering in the stead of his son” (Genesis 22:13).

While journeying to the place of sacrifice, Abraham had said that “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (v. 8). Appropriately, after the incident, Abraham named the mountain *Jehovah* [the Lord] *Jireh* [will provide].

In Hebrew there is not a specific verb form to designate the future tense, and so the word *Jireh* could easily be translated “is providing.” Actually, where the Lord's provision is concerned, the tense makes little difference. The Creator of time (Genesis 1:1) stands outside of time. We may sometimes be frustrated and disturbed because we see only the present, and we don't even see that very clearly. But God sees and answers in the proper time, perhaps later than we have asked, or perhaps, as in Abraham's case, beforehand, providing the ram already caught in the thicket.

How often have we received an answer to prayer only to realize events had been set in motion long before we prayed? We should be aware of and thankful for God's anticipation of our needs. “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer” (Isaiah 65:24). JDM

The Time of Old Age

“Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.” (Psalm 71:18)

One tends to grow resentful against the limitations and increasing infirmities associated with aging, even complaining to God and others about growing old—at least until one considers the alternative! We need to remember that as long as the Lord preserves our lives, He has some ministry for us to perform for “this generation” and “to every one that is to come.”

The Scriptures abound with promises of blessing in old age, so growing old should be an occasion for rejoicing and deepened commitment to whatever the Lord enables one to do. “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: . . . Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age” (Psalm 92:12-14). But if there develops a tendency to grow spiritually cold with age, the admonition of Paul is appropriate. “Aged men [should] be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, . . . teachers of good things” (Titus 2:2-3).

Thus, the heartfelt prayer of the psalmist in our text is still appropriate today, for all who will, sooner than they think, enter the time of old age. Note also the following prayer: “Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth” (Psalm 71:9). That God will answer such a prayer, offered in faith and sincerity, was affirmed by David when he said: “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). The time of old age can be a time of happy harvest if we have sowed the seeds of good fruit. HMM

Thursday, December 29

Absolute Trust

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him.” (Job 13:15-16)

The patriarch Job was, according to God’s own testimony, the most perfect and upright man in all the earth (Job 1:8), yet he was subjected to the most severe testings that anyone (except Christ Himself) ever had to endure. He lost all his great possessions and his large family in a single day, then was afflicted for months on end with a most loathsome and painful disease. He lost the respect of all who had once honored and followed him, and was even accused by his closest friends of being a wicked sinner and arrogant hypocrite. Worst of all, the God whom he had loved and faithfully served all his life had apparently completely ignored his prayers for deliverance or even for understanding of what was happening to him. Finally, a presumptuous young religionist related what he (falsely) claimed was a divine message that even God had accused Job of sin and hypocrisy.

Yet, despite all this, Job never once lost his faith! “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,” he insisted. “For I know that my redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25), and “he also shall be my salvation” (today’s verse).

What an example has been provided us by this ancient patriarch, whose knowledge of God’s Word, God’s love, and God’s great salvation through faith in Christ was only a small fraction of what we know now, with God’s complete revelation before us. The apostle James well reminds us of “the patience of Job,” probably the greatest example of all “the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience” (James 5:10-11). We can, like Job, know that He who created us deserves absolute trust. HMM

Friday, December 30

Our Job as Ambassadors

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Christ has made each of us His ambassadors here on Earth. He is no longer here in the flesh, and so now He expects us to faithfully and effectively represent Him. As His ambassadors or representatives, He has given us two basic tasks to perform.

First of all, we are to spread the good news of salvation in such a way that unbelievers will be drawn to the light and out of their darkness. “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, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18). To do this, an ambassador must live a life of conformity to His life and teachings. “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:15), adequately representing Him.

Secondly, we are to saturate ourselves totally with the knowledge of His will and His Word so that we will be enabled to encourage other Christians, strengthening them for their duties as ambassadors as well. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), applying our attention to His directives. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

It has rightly been said that the only two things that will last for eternity are people and the Word of God. These things must occupy our attention if we are to be effective “ambassadors for Christ.” JDM

Saturday, December 31

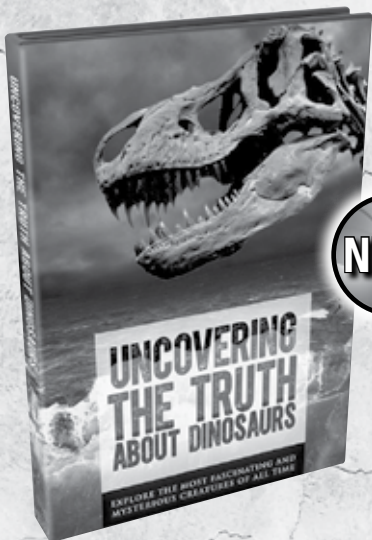
Willful Sins

“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” (Hebrews 10:26-27)

This is one of the most controversial passages of Scripture because of its apparent conflict with passages that teach salvation by grace entirely apart from the law or any form of works (e.g., Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5), and absolute security in salvation to those who belong to Christ (e.g., John 10:28-29; Romans 8:35-39).

Actually, many passages warn against deliberate acts of sin by Christians. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar” (1 John 2:4). “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him” (Titus 1:16).

Clearly, there are dozens of “proof texts” on both sides of this question, and it cannot be settled by citing a cliché or two in a brief study like this. There can be no real contradiction in God’s Word, however, so the Lord must have had a good reason for inspiring this apparent paradox in His book. On the one hand, it is vital for every true believer in Christ to know that He is saved and has eternal 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 5:13). On the other hand, it is deadly dangerous for a person merely to think he or she is saved when there is no evidence of a changed life. Such Scriptures as our text give sober warning that professing Christians have no basis for any assurance of salvation if they do not obey His words. “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). Therefore, “examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). HMM



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Sunday, January 1

A New Song for a New Year

*“Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.”
(Psalm 33:3)*

This is the first of nine references in the Bible to a “new song.” Appropriately, the song of Psalm 33 deals with the primeval event of creation, and it is the first psalm that does so (note also Psalm 104, etc.).

The new song is to be sung with instrumental accompaniment. However, the Hebrew word translated “loud noise” is so translated nowhere else; it is translated many different ways, but perhaps the familiar rendering “joyful sound” (Psalm 89:15) is the most appropriate here. In any case, this new song is of great importance and so should be performed well and joyfully, for it deals with the grandest of themes.

First of all is the great assertion that “the word of the LORD” is always right and the “works” of the Lord are always of truth (33:4). His righteousness and goodness are evident everywhere to those with eyes to see and hearts to believe (v. 5).

Then there is the vital revelation that God’s creation of all things was simply by His mighty word, “the breath of his mouth,” accomplished instantly, and not dragged out over long ages of evolutionary trial and error. “He spake, and it was done” (vv. 6, 9).

Furthermore, it is a comfort to know that God does not change, though new years come and go. “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever” (v. 11). “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (v. 12).

There are many other great themes in this new song, and it would indeed be well to read and rehearse them all as the new year begins, committing ourselves once again to the faithful teaching of His inerrant Word, His magnificent creation, and His great salvation. HMM

Monday, January 2

The Hallelujah Psalms

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

The last five chapters in the book of Psalms (146–150) comprise what might be considered a great “Hallelujah Chorus” to this “Hallel” book—the “book of Israel’s praises,” as the book of Psalms was called by the Israelites.

Each psalm in this five-psalm group both begins and ends with an exclamatory “Praise ye the LORD,” or, in the Hebrew, “Hallelujah!” This word occurs 22 times in the book of Psalms. This is significant in that the Hebrew language has just 22 letters, suggesting to us that the very purpose of language is for God to reveal His Word to man and for man then to respond with thanksgiving and praise to God.

It is further significant that the letters of the Greek language in the New Testament begin with “alpha” and end with “omega,” and that Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, has reminded us that “I am Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:11; 22:13). The Greek word “Alleluia” occurs just four times in the New Testament, all at the great congregation in heaven that will assemble at the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (19:1-6, 9). This may also well be what is called “the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23).

There, along with “an innumerable company of angels,” all the redeemed saints of all the ages will gather to rejoice and give thanks and “praise our God, all ye his servants” (Revelation 19:5). It seems possible—even probable—that these five Hallelujah psalms will constitute the testimonies of praise and thanksgiving that will be sung by this great congregation in the presence of the Lamb. The book of Psalms then closes with the great exhortation: “Let every thing that hath breath [or ‘Spirit’] praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 150:6). HMM

Tuesday, January 3

Blessed Are the Dead

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.” (Revelation 14:13)

This promise applies specifically to those recent believers who will suffer martyrdom during the last half of the awful tribulation period (“henceforth,” in context). But dealing as it does with the state of the believing dead, in principle, it surely likewise applies to all who die “in the Lord.”

How are they blessed? In numerous ways, according to this verse.

First, they are blessed in that they “rest from their labors.” In this life we earn our physical sustenance by “the sweat of [our] face” (Genesis 3:19). Here we must work hard to train our minds (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Now we constantly battle our inward, fallen nature: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). Even as we attempt to serve our fellow man, our efforts are spurned and rejected. Not so for the dead! There all these labors will cease, and joyous, eternal service to the Lamb will commence (Revelation 22:3).

Secondly, they are blessed in that their labors continue to bear fruit even after they have gone. Perhaps even a previous word or act of testimony will be the eventual tool God uses to bring someone to Himself, and the reward will be properly distributed. No act done to the glory of God will pass unnoticed.

Thirdly, what a blessing to know that this state is promised by the very Spirit of God Himself. One’s worth at death is not measured by the content and sincerity of the opinions of friends at his funeral.

This doctrine should produce both great courage for the Christian and great comfort for the bereaved. JDM

There Shall Be No Night

“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)

In the account of the creation, we read that the first word from God was “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). He did not actually create or make light, as He did everything else, since God is light (1 John 1:5). He did create darkness, however (Isaiah 45:7), and then divided the light from the darkness. “And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night” (Genesis 1:5).

Although the darkness of night can be a time of blessing through rest and sleep, it also soon came to symbolize spiritual darkness. Most evil deeds are done at night, and Christians are warned to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). God has called us “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

In that wonderful age to come when we go to dwell in our eternal home in the Holy City, the city gates “shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there” (Revelation 21:25). “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23).

The sun and moon will still be functioning in the heavens, however, for “he hath also stablished them for ever and ever” (Psalm 148:6). In fact, all the stars will also shine “for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). Our God is the Creator, not an uncreator. As wise Solomon noted: “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever” (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

The sun and moon will still be there, but their light will not be needed in the Holy City where we shall live, for the Lamb of God will also be the Lamp of God. He is the Light of the world and where He is, in His eternal glory, there can be no night. HMM

Thursday, January 5

The Book of Books

“This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him.”
(Genesis 5:1)

The Bible (literally “the book”) contains over 200 references to books. This implies, among other things, God’s approval of communication by books. Our text, containing the first mention of the word “book” in the Bible, indicates that the very first man wrote a book! “Give attendance to reading,” Paul recommends (1 Timothy 4:13), especially the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

The pattern of first and last mentions of “book” in the Bible is noteworthy, for all refer to divinely written or divinely inspired books. The first use in the New Testament is in the very first verse—“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ” (Matthew 1:1). The book of Adam’s “generations” is, in a special sense, the Old Testament; the book of the generation of Jesus Christ—the last Adam—is, in a similar sense, the New Testament.

The final mention of “book” in the Old Testament is in Malachi 3:16: “A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.”

The third-from-last verse of the New Testament contains no less than three references to God’s books: “If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, . . . and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:19).

Note the significant modifiers attached to these six key references: “the book of the generations of Adam,” “a book of remembrance,” “the book of the generation of Jesus Christ,” “the book of this prophecy,” “the book of life,” and finally, simply “this book”! HMM

Friday, January 6

Raised Us Up Together

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:6)

The Bible clearly identifies the resurrection of Christ as central to the Christian message, just as crucial as the atoning death of Christ. “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). And just as surely as Christ is raised, we who have put our faith in Him shall be raised.

What kind of body will we have then? “We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). In His resurrection body, He could appear and disappear (John 20:19), pass through closed doors (v. 26), be felt by others (Matthew 28:9; John 20:27), eat food (Luke 24:42, 43), and He eventually rose into heaven (Acts 1:9).

Paul, who has been dead nearly 2,000 years, asserted: “We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20-21). How can a person long since dead, whose spirit has been in God’s presence, receive once again a body? This, of course, is a miracle, for the physical elements that once made up Paul’s earthly body have long ago changed their form, and even while he was alive were continually being replaced. No, God will not restore a prior body to the dead but will present them with a new “glorious” body, fit for the eternal environment and service of heaven. Paul could only write of it by analogy, comparing the difference between the old and the new bodies to the difference between a seed and a plant, to different kinds of living things, and to different kinds of celestial bodies. “So also is the resurrection of the dead.” It is sown in corruption, dishonor, weakness, as a natural body, but it is raised in incorruption, glory, and power, as a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:37-44). JDM

Saturday, January 7

The Mount of Olives

“And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.”
(2 Samuel 15:30)

The Mount of Olives overlooks Jerusalem from the east. This first reference to it notes the sad occasion when King David had to flee Jerusalem for his life, escaping the conspiracy of his estranged son Absalom.

Just as David wept over Jerusalem as he left it, so would his greater son, Jesus, a thousand years later, weep over the city as He entered it from Mount Olivet (Luke 19:37, 41). It was there that He gave the great prophecy of His second coming (Matthew 24:3). It was also there He went with His disciples after the last supper, and there He agonized in prayer, alone, in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:26, 32). Finally, after His death and resurrection, it was from the Mount of Olives that He ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:10-12).

This is far from the end of the story, however. The Mount of Olives has an amazing role yet to play in the world's future, according to a prophecy given long ago. “Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, . . . And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south” (Zechariah 14:1, 4). Instead of a mountain there will be a valley, and “living waters shall go out from Jerusalem” (v. 8). Instead of a mountain for weeping there will be a stream of rejoicing, and “the LORD shall be king over all the earth” (v. 9). HMM

Fountain of Life

“The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” (Proverbs 14:27)

This beautiful phrase, “fountain of life,” is used several times in the Old Testament, serving as a metaphor to illuminate a number of important aspects of spiritual faith and experience. Our text stresses “the fear of the LORD” as providing deliverance from death to life, picturing this new life as flowing from a heavenly spring.

A very similar verse is Proverbs 13:14: “The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” Thus, the fear of the Lord is somehow tantamount to “the law of the wise.” Those who are wise will fear the Lord and thus receive living water from “the fountain of life.”

King David penned the wonderful truth of Psalm 36:9: “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.” “God is light” (1 John 1:5), so “the fountain of life” becomes the source also of all true light, whether physical or spiritual. “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

The same word is rendered as “well” in Proverbs 10:11: “The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.” When a believer has received life from the divine fountain, his testimony becomes a fountain of life.

The Lord Himself is the fountain of life in Jeremiah’s prophecy, but the supposed people of God have refused to drink. “For my people . . . have forsaken me the fountain of living waters” (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13).

Nevertheless, this fountain is still there for all who will come. The Bible’s last promise has to do with this great fountain, which yields “a pure river of water of life, . . . proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. . . . And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:1, 17). HMM

Monday, January 9

The Chief Fathers

“Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.” (Acts 7:8)

Without these patriarchs’ faithful contribution and commitment to a future they could hardly understand, you and I would be without the historical evidence of the biblical foundation upon which our faith rests.

Abraham, who was used by God to be the “father of many nations,” was given a covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) that applies to all who are saved by faith in the work of God accomplished through Jesus Christ on the cross, who rose from the grave and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father. Abraham became the example of salvation by faith (Romans 4:1-16; Galatians 3:9-24).

Isaac was the Promised Seed from whom the nation Israel came. He is the Old Testament example of the willing sacrifice of the Messiah yet to come (Hebrews 11:17-19), and he became the genetic head of Israel (Romans 9:7).

Jacob is an example of God’s sovereign right to choose those whom He wills to serve Him (Romans 9:10-13). He is often misjudged for his “deception” of Isaac, yet Isaac had chosen the wicked Esau to inherit the blessing even though Jacob was chosen prior to his birth to be the heir (Genesis 25:23). Jacob fathered 12 sons through four wives, and God Himself changed his name to Israel (Genesis 32:28; 35:22).

Joseph became the prime minister of Egypt and was responsible for preserving the budding nation of Israel. He is an example of the steadfast, trusting, and faithful servant who simply expects God to accomplish the good God intended (Genesis 50:20; Acts 7:9-18).

Perhaps the struggles, sacrifices, and successes of their lives need to be a fresh memory for each of us. HMM III

Tuesday, January 10

Abram the Called

“So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.” (Genesis 12:4)

It is not clear from the text just how God made Himself known to Abram when He called him to go to Canaan. The language would imply that there was an audible conversation of some sort—far different from what you and I might expect today. At the time of this calling, Abram was a not then a follower of *Yahweh*, yet the circumstances of God’s intervention were enough to persuade Abram to uproot his family and start the journey.

Abram’s calling and initial response (Genesis 12:1-5) are analogous to an “awakening,” the initial faith to “see” God (Ephesians 2:8). There were no specifics in God’s promise, only broad terms of blessing.

Abram’s response was all that he knew to do at that time, to respond in obedience (non-resistance) just as the Scripture implies we are to do (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:2-5). Salvation is completely God’s doing; our “work” is never involved (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:8-17). All we can ever do is rebel and reject the drawing that God wields (John 6:44). Damnation is man’s work (John 3:19-21; Romans 1:18-32).

That is why Abram became the biblical example of the faithful (Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 11:8-10). The actual moment of Abram’s “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24) seems to have come somewhat later when he “believes God” (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). Although repentance and faith may come in a rapid sequence, sometimes (especially in adult conversions) the events may be drawn out over time. Either way, it is by “grace are ye saved, through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). HMM III

Wednesday, January 11

Abram's Trust Test

“And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.” (Genesis 12:10)

After Abram moved to Canaan at God's calling, a test came in the form of a severe famine in the new “land of promise.” He became consumed with worry about business survival, leading him to make the decision to leave the land God had promised to give him and take himself and his family into the great empire of Egypt.

Egypt was dominated, as is every world system, by a pagan government. Abram knew this. Yet, motivated by a fear for his personal safety, colored by a self-induced, self-protecting imagination, he became willing to risk the moral compromise of his wife (to say nothing of the potential of destroying God's promise of an heir) and made an awful decision (Genesis 12:10-13).

Sure enough, what Abram feared seemed to happen. Sarai was rather quickly taken into Pharaoh's harem. And things seemed to go well as a result; he prospered doing business (Genesis 12:14-16). Sometimes, things work out as we think they might—but God's sovereign plan will always override our foolish and deceitful behavior (Genesis 12:17-20).

It was a long time before the testimony of Abram was restored in Egypt. Not only did his sin become public knowledge, but the pagan rulers rebuked him for his error (Genesis 12:20). God may undo the potential damage of our foolish behavior, but the spiritual damage is real. The biblical principle is: “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).

Fortunately, God is also the God of mercy and forgiveness. Abram returned to Canaan, repented of his sin, and restored his fellowship with God. When such sin enters our lives, we can learn the lesson and regain our role with our Creator, just as Abram did. HMM III

Thursday, January 12

Abram's Obedience Test

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. . . . And he gave him tithes of all.” (Genesis 14:18, 20)

This is one of the more curious passages of the Old Testament. Abram had rescued his nephew Lot, along with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, after a fierce running battle with a five-king federation led by Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam (Genesis 14:1-17).

As Abram returned victorious from the battle, he was met by Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who seems either to represent or actually be the pre-incarnate Person of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:1-3). Melchizedek greeted Abram with words of victory and praise, to which Abram responded with a no-nonsense declaration of his service to the “most high God” (Genesis 14:22-24).

The king of Sodom offered to let Abram take the spoils of war. The custom was (and is) well established that the victor was due all the value of the conquered land. Abram's response was most gracious. Not only would he take nothing for himself other than what was due his servants and confederates, but he would return everything outside of the tithe to the original owners. “Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (Hebrews 7:4).

It is here that tithing is established in Scripture, long before the Mosaic law. The event is so incidental that it seems the custom had already been in practice for some time. Whatever the case, Abram offers “tithes of all” to Melchizedek without a second thought. Centuries later, the Lord Jesus told the Pharisees that they ought to pay their tithes “and not to leave the [weightier matters] undone” (Matthew 23:23). It is interesting how much the tithing practice is still debated among God's children. HMM III

Friday, January 13

Abram's Endurance Test

“And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.” (Genesis 15:3-4)

Right after Abram's meeting with Melchizedek, God verified and amplified His promise to him with the added insights that God would be Abram's "shield" and "reward" (Genesis 15:1). The preceding years had been somewhat difficult for Abram, and he needed assurance that the One he believed in was both his Savior and Provider.

The Lord walked Abram through an elaborate covenant ceremony (Genesis 15:9-21) in which He told Abram much of the future and reiterated the promise that God would give the land to Abram and his descendants. Given the personal visit, Abram would have been expectant of some indication of the fulfillment of the promise of an heir and the coming "nations," but it would be a total of 25 years before Abram saw the fulfillment of that promise.

Nothing. No visible evidence of God's promise was forthcoming. Others failed (Lot most noticeably), and Sarai herself gave up after 11 years and insisted that Abram bear her a child through Hagar, her handmaid (Genesis 16:15).

Finally, when Abram was 99, God appeared before him again and issued the command: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Genesis 17:1). Isaac would be born the next year, but the complete fulfillment of that promise is yet to be realized (John 11:25-26; Mark 13:13). HMM III

Saturday, January 14

Abraham's Intercession Test

"I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD." (Genesis 18:21-22)

Three "men" stood before Abraham's tent, two of whom were later revealed to be angels (Genesis 18:2; 19:1). One of them, however, was none other than the Creator Himself (as the visible Word of God), who told Abraham of the beginning of the fulfillment of His earlier promise of a son (Genesis 18:10, 14).

As the Lord reiterated the promise (now nearly 25 years dormant), the confrontation with Sarah began (Genesis 18:9-15). She "laughs" at the repeated promise, citing her old and "worn out" body as an excuse. Most noteworthy here is the immediate response of God: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). Although Sarah mocked the Lord's promise, Abraham reacted with the laughter of joy and anticipation. His faith was now firm and confident (Genesis 18:16-22).

As God told him of His immediate plan to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham began his intercession on behalf of any righteous residents there (Genesis 19:23-32). Yet, even though the Lord yielded each time to Abraham's limiting request, it was clear that the wickedness of those cities would come under the righteous judgment of a holy God.

Abraham "returned unto his place" (Genesis 18:33), knowing that while he had prayed for God's grace, he was satisfied that God's judgment was "righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:9). The contrast of attitude toward God's Word is on display in this section of Scripture. "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves" (Psalm 100:3). HMM III

Sunday, January 15

Abraham's Separation Test

"Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son." (Genesis 21:10-11)

After Isaac had been weaned, Sarah noticed Ishmael mocking her and Isaac (Genesis 21:9). During the years since Hagar had given birth to Ishmael (at the insistence of Sarah), Abraham had grown to love Ishmael and had no doubt treated him and Hagar with respect. Now this sudden banishment was demanded under terms that were both harsh and apparently arbitrary.

Nonetheless, God approved because Hagar and Ishmael had become the specific illustration of a distinction between the "flesh" and the "heir" (Genesis 21:12). Although God would take care of Ishmael for Abraham's sake, Abraham must separate himself and his family from that which would never become part of the Messianic line (Galatians 4:23-31).

The contrast of the two sons is a major teaching in Scripture. Galatians 3:16-29 provides most of the main biblical information. The promise was made to "the seed" (as singular), and the focus is on Christ, not Isaac. All people are under sin and are given the promise by faith. When we believe, we become children of God, in vivid contrast to the "son of the bondwoman."

That faith is outside of physical relationships, and we become heirs according to the promise. That sacred relationship has been verified by God Himself (Hebrews 6:17-20), making us nothing less than joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17-21). Thus, all who are heirs can never be connected to the "bondwoman" (Galatians 4:30-31). HMM III

Monday, January 16

Lot's Fateful Choice

“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere. . . . Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.” (Genesis 13:10-11)

Some otherwise righteous folks are unable to handle wealth. Lot and Abram had become so wealthy “that they could not dwell together” (Genesis 13:6), and Lot fell into the classic temptation—loving “all that is in the world” (1 John 2:16).

Beginning by pitching “his tent toward Sodom” (Genesis 13:12), Lot later “dwelt in Sodom, and his goods” (Genesis 14:12). And even though he was “vexed” by the “filthy” behavior of those with whom he was living (2 Peter 2:7-8), Lot finally “sat in the gate of Sodom”—a Hebrew idiom for holding a political place of power in the city (Genesis 19:1).

We are told that Lot was a just and righteous man (2 Peter 2:7-8). But ungodly choices *always* produce tragic results. When the angels arrived to bring God’s judgment, his children had intermarried with Sodomites and had been lost (Genesis 19:12-14). His wife wouldn’t leave (Genesis 19:26), and his wealth was destroyed with the destruction of the cities.

Lot’s reputation and eternal place in Kingdom history are equally tragic. Although rescued by the angels, his legacy is: “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). Although granted his wish to live in a “little” city (Genesis 19:20), his daughters corrupted themselves with him, and the pagan nations of Moab and Ammon were the result (Genesis 19:30-38). Although we will see Lot in heaven, he became the epitome of one whose works are “burned” and he is saved, “yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). Even *small* ungodly choices can cause us to lose “a full reward” (2 John 1:8). HMM III

Tuesday, January 17

Eliezer's Faithful Service

“And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had . . . go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.” (Genesis 24:2, 4)

Abraham required a most sacred vow from Eliezer (Genesis 15:2) to secure a bride for Isaac from the line of Shem rather than from the Canaanites (Genesis 24:3-4, 9). Eliezer had Abraham's complete trust, with access and permission to all of his wealth (Genesis 24:10).

The Bible notes how Eliezer prepared for the success of the mission with adequate resources (employees, wealth, etc.), and went straight to his destination with no wasted time en route. Along the way he must have anticipated how to discern a proper wife and asked God for verification that He approved of the selection.

Eliezer's request indicated he had in mind a lady who must be strong, healthy, and industrious, with no delusions of a life of ease. She must also be gracious, sensitive, and compassionate. Eliezer's prayer did not presume. He knew the assignment and was asking for guidance on how to “see” the character of the potential wife (Genesis 24:12-14).

Eliezer was further aware of his being “in the way” (Genesis 24:27). That is, he was clearly aware that he was acting under godly authority and was seeking the leading of the Lord Himself. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD” (Psalm 37:23), and our paths are directed when we “acknowledge him” (Proverbs 3:6).

After Eliezer completed defining his task, he insisted that an immediate decision be made so that he could finish his assignment. Once the family and Rebecca agreed, Eliezer made sure that the mission was completed by bringing the new bride home to Isaac (Genesis 24:32-67). Would to God that all of us were as faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2). HMM III

Isaac's Life of Contrast

“And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.” (Genesis 25:27-28)

Isaac's early life became the biblical picture of Christ (Genesis 22:7-9). Not only did Isaac lay down his life voluntarily, but he continued to show great evidence of God's presence and promise. He had personal instruction in faith from Abraham (Genesis 18:19) and had been given direct evidence of God's sovereignty in his life (Genesis 24:67).

Even before the birth of his sons when he was 60 years old, Isaac interceded for Rebecca and the children (Genesis 25:21). It is certain that he had firsthand knowledge of God's plan for the boys (Genesis 26:2-53; 28:1-4), yet in spite of his knowledge, Isaac “loved Esau” (our text).

He knew that God had chosen the younger child to rule (Genesis 25:23). He knew that Esau was an ungodly man (Genesis 27:46), and he knew that Esau had married pagan wives (Genesis 26:34) in spite of God's command to the contrary. But Isaac was determined to give the birthright to Esau. The single reason Scripture cites for Isaac's irrational behavior was that he loved Esau and the savory meat Esau brought in from hunting (Genesis 27:1-4).

Isaac finally gave the blessing to Jacob, but he would have blessed Esau; he would have gone against God's command, and he “trembled exceedingly” when he knew that he had been overruled by God (Genesis 27:30-33). Ultimately, Isaac submitted to God and instructed Jacob in righteousness (Genesis 28:1-5). The pain in Jacob's life, the agony of Rebecca's separation from her son, and the torn testimony of Isaac were all caused by an incorrect “love.” HMM III

Thursday, January 19

Jacob's Plain Life

“Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.” (Genesis 25:27)

Jacob has often been given a bad reputation for his deception of Isaac. He is branded a liar and worse, while the Scriptures describe him very differently. To begin with, the Hebrew word translated “plain” in our text is *tam*, everywhere else rendered as “perfect” or “upright.”

The same word is used most often by God Himself of Job—a “perfect” and “upright” man (Job 1:8). All other references in the Bible where *tam* is used verify this upright and undefiled character. The deception is not rebuked by God, and Jacob is honored by God far more than Isaac. In fact, Jacob is renamed “Israel” by God—hardly a punishment for a bad life, but rather a recognition of a great life (Genesis 32:28).

The sin of Isaac and Esau is infinitely greater. Esau has “sold” and “despised” the birthright (Genesis 25:33-34). Isaac would have given that blessing to Esau (Genesis 27:1-4) in spite of God’s plan (Genesis 25:23). The intention of Jacob and Rebecca was to prevent a horrible disobedience and catastrophe.

Jacob’s action gave him no temporal advantage and was taken at great personal risk. Jacob spent 20 years in exile and servitude to his wicked uncle Laban, 14 of them for Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29:20-29). While there, he endured the awful trickery of Laban, but God gave him 12 sons and one daughter (Genesis 29:31–30:24).

God’s intervention and Jacob’s careful attention to detail brought wealth and a growing confidence that God had turned his life around, providing the leadership his family needed to leave suddenly and go with confidence back to the land of Abraham (Genesis 31), having received personal assurance from God (Genesis 32:24-30).

May we all have the reputation of a “plain” life. HMM III

Friday, January 20

Jacob's Ladder Dream

“And Jacob went out from Beersheba. . . . And he lighted upon a certain place . . . and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” (Genesis 28:10-12)

Prophetic dreams were uncommon even in ancient times (Hebrews 1:1) and were never for personal use (Jeremiah 23:16-32; Jude 1:8). Such dreams were rare until the book of Revelation.

Jacob had the most personal encounters with God recorded in Genesis, more than Abraham or any other patriarch. Jacob's ladder was much more than a human construction. The Hebrew word *cullam* is used only this once. The root Hebrew word, *culal*, is similar, with the basic meaning of “highway” or “corridor” or “pathway.” The word carries the connotation of “lift up” (see Psalm 68:4).

Jacob's “ladder” was probably a highway/causeway to and from the presence of God. Perhaps it was something like our science fiction ideas of a wormhole—a time warp in the fabric of space that permits nearly instantaneous movement from one spot in the universe to another.

The Creator would certainly be able to make a time warp channel for His messengers to get back and forth to Earth quickly. There may be many such channels. This *cullam* was “fastened” on the earth with its “source” in heaven. The angels of God were speeding up and down (through? on? in?) it.

At the source, Jacob saw none other than the *Yahweh* (the I AM) of eternity standing in His “official” glory (compare Revelation 1:10-16). This vision verified to Jacob that God was with him and that God Himself would secure the eternal promises made to Abraham. This dream is unique in all Scripture. Jacob was an unusual man. HMM III

Saturday, January 21

The Mercy Seat

“And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.” (Exodus 25:21-22)

In the “holy of holies” of the tabernacle, God would meet with Israel’s high priest once a year to commune with His people at a meeting place called the “mercy seat.” The Hebrew word was derived from the word for “atonement,” which in turn meant essentially a “covering” for the Ark of the Covenant. On the great day of atonement each year, the high priest was commanded to sprinkle the blood from the sin offerings on the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:14-15) to make an atonement for all the people.

This annual ceremony, of course, merely prefigures the full atonement that Christ would make one day when “by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12). Since this blood has been sprinkled once for all on the heavenly mercy seat, as it were, we are now “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:24-25).

In this verse, the word “propitiation” is the Greek word for “mercy seat” (and is so translated in Hebrews 9:5). That is, Christ Himself, with His atoning blood, is our mercy seat, where we can meet with God. Thus, the golden, blood-stained mercy seat becomes the very throne of God Himself, where He meets with those who believe on Him for salvation. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16). HMM

Sunday, January 22

The Psalm of Life

“I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.” (Psalm 91:2)

This marvelous psalm of life and security follows a psalm of frailty and death (Psalm 90) written by Moses, who may have been the author of this psalm as well. For our devotional study today, attention is called to the change of personal pronoun throughout, implying a dialogue between three speakers.

The psalm begins as a godly teacher, or prophet, or perhaps an angel bestows a benediction upon the believer: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1), ascribing the security of the believer to the character of God.

The believer responds to this blessing by avowing his trust in God and in His character (v. 2).

To the testimony of the believer, the first speaker replies, expounding on the former blessing, detailing the protection provided by God (vv. 3-8) and the blessings of that care. Note, “because thou [the believer] hast made the LORD [Jehovah], which is my [the speaker’s] refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (vv. 9-12).

At the end, Jehovah Himself responds, confirming all that the speaker has said: “Because he [the believer] hath set his love upon me [Jehovah], therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation” (vv. 14-16). JDM

Monday, January 23

The Queen of Sheba

“And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.” (1 Kings 10:1)

A thousand years after the famous visit of Sheba’s queen to the court of King Solomon, Jesus made a remarkable spiritual application of her experience. “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42).

Solomon had prayed for wisdom, and the Lord gave him such legendary wisdom that the news even reached the distant land of Sheba, south of Ethiopia. We do not know what hard questions were confronting Sheba’s queen, but she finally decided she must find their solutions through Solomon and his God. God honored her searching faith, “and Solomon told her all her questions,” so that she could testify that “the half was not told me. . . . Blessed be the LORD thy God” (1 Kings 10:3, 7, 9).

In Jesus Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). He who had given Solomon his great wisdom promises us that “if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

Truly the queen of Sheba will be a witness against our present generation in the coming day of judgment. People today turn to every variety of humanistic counselors for their training and guidance but refuse to come to the one who is “made unto us wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:30). The “Wonderful Counsellor” (Isaiah 9:6), who is far greater than Solomon, who said “I am . . . the truth” (John 14:6), and who promises that “the truth shall make you free” (8:32), is still inviting all from the uttermost parts of the earth to come. HMM

Tuesday, January 24

Moses and the Shining Face

“And it came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses’ hand . . . that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.” (Exodus 34:29)

Moses had been alone with God 40 days and 40 nights, simply communing with God and receiving the tables with the Ten Commandments. When he finally descended, the glory of God so radiated from him that the people could not bear to look at his face, and he had to wear a veil even to speak to them.

The council of Jewish leaders had a similar experience as they interrogated Stephen concerning his Christian testimony: “And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).

None of us today ever seem to exhibit such glowing faces, nor is anyone likely to mistake us for an angel. But perhaps this is because we have not spent the time in His presence that Moses did, nor preached the Word in the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit as Stephen did. Nevertheless, we should have a different countenance than before we met the Lord. Men should be able to say of us as it was said of Peter and John: “They marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (4:13).

In fact, God even promises that this will be so to the extent that we spend time in His Word, which itself is alive with the light of His glory. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

May God enable us, therefore, to be “holding forth the word of life,” even “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15-16). HMM

Wednesday, January 25

Threefold Deliverance

“For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.” (Psalm 116:8)

This is the beautiful testimony of the psalmist when the Lord answered his prayer: “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul” (vv. 3-4). The Lord does, indeed, deliver our souls when we call upon Him for salvation in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, “for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Divine deliverance, however, is more than deliverance from death and hell. “Therefore the redeemed of the LORD . . . shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away” (Isaiah 51:11). “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying” (Revelation 21:4). God delivers us from the penalty of our sins, from death and hell, right now, and then from all our sorrows and tears in the age to come, delivering us even from all the effects of sin forever.

But He also delivers us right now from the power of sin in our lives, which would otherwise come again to cause our downfall even after we have been saved. Many a fearful Christian, afraid that he is unable to hang on to the Lord, needs to know that it is the Lord who hangs on to him! “For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” (Psalm 56:13). Our Savior, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification, promises this. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall [anyone] pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). HMM

Altar Building

“And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.” (Genesis 12:7)

This is the first reference to Abraham building an altar in Scripture. Building an altar and making sacrifice to God denotes total dependence and reliance on Him. It implies saying no to self and yes to God—in effect presenting one’s self in submission to God as a sinner, trusting Him for gracious handling of one’s sin, and discounting one’s value apart from His work. Building altars became a habit with godly Abraham, the “friend of God” (James 2:23), and he practiced it many times during his life (see also Genesis 12:8; 13:4, 18).

We can surmise that at an early age, Abraham’s son, Isaac, was taught this same practice. It doesn’t seem that Isaac misunderstood or debated the situation, even when he himself was identified as the sacrifice to be slaughtered (Genesis 22:9). He fully trusted and worshiped the same God, and evidently agreed with Abraham’s obedient act. Later, Isaac himself practiced altar-building at least once on his own (26:25).

Compare Abraham and his family to Lot and his family. Nowhere in Scripture does it say that Lot built an altar and recognized God as worthy of worship. No doubt as a direct result, Lot’s wife, sons, and daughters totally rejected these ideas, preferring the sinful practices and mentality of Sodom. Lot was a true believer (2 Peter 2:7-8), but his lifestyle and lack of “altar-building” rubbed off on his family, to the detriment of himself and the people of God ever since.

Here is the question: Do we want to be Christians who ignore proper worship and total submission to God and have families who do likewise? We don’t build physical altars today, but we do need daily times of family prayer. JDM

Friday, January 27

Rest Only in Christ

“But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.” (Genesis 8:9)

Unlike the raven, which Noah had sent out first, the dove could not live on the carrion floating on the floodwaters. After nine months cooped up in the Ark, she had reveled in her freedom when Noah first released her from the window of the Ark. Unaware of the outside perils while safe with Noah, she flew gaily off into the open spaces beyond, just like many a professing Christian, eager to cast off the constraints of his or her parental religion. “And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness” (Psalm 55:6-7).

But the dove could find no rest away from Noah, whose very name means “rest”! His father, Lamech, by prophetic inspiration, had called his name Noah, saying, “This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed” (Genesis 5:29). So, she finally returned, finding rest once again in Noah’s outstretched hands.

Just so, the Lord Jesus, in His greater ark of secure salvation, is waiting at its open window with arms outstretched, inviting all those weary of the doomed world outside to return to Him. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). Christ’s message to the weary wanderer is: “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, . . . return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isaiah 44:22). HMM

Saturday, January 28

The Folly of Humanism

“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.” (Psalm 14:1)

Despite all their pretense of scientific intellectualism, those who deny the existence of a personal Creator God are, in God’s judgment, nothing but fools. The 14th Psalm, the 53rd Psalm, Romans 3, etc., all describe the inner character of all such people—whether they call themselves atheists or humanists or pantheists or whatever. This repeated emphasis indicates how strongly God feels about those who dare to question His reality. It is bad enough to disobey His commandments and to spurn His love; it is utter folly to deny that He even exists!

The Bible describes the awful descent from true creationism into evolutionary pantheistic humanism. “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. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:21-22, 25).

Certain atheists/humanists claim to be moral people, though their criteria of morality are often quite different from those of the Bible. No matter how admirable their humane acts of “righteousness” may seem, however, they are guilty of the sin of unbelief, the greatest sin of all. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is” (Hebrews 11:6). With all the innumerable evidences of God’s reality as seen in the creation and throughout history, and then especially in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, it is utter foolishness to plunge blindly into eternity to meet the God whom they deny. HMM

Sunday, January 29

Lovingkindness and Tender Mercy

“Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old.” (Psalm 25:6)

These beautiful words, “tender mercies” and “lovingkindness,” may sound somewhat old-fashioned in today’s sophisticated jargon, but the divine attributes they represent have been “ever of old” and will continue to characterize our tender and merciful, kind and loving God of all grace forever. Dropping them from our conversation (even in most newer translations of the Bible) is a sad loss that, to some degree, has impoverished our speech and, perhaps, our souls.

Note some of the rich scriptural testimonies associated with them: “[The LORD] redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (Psalm 103:4). “Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me” (Psalm 40:11). “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). “Hear me, O LORD; for thy lovingkindness is good; turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies” (Psalm 69:16).

Other than Proverbs 12:10 (“the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel”), all the occurrences of these two terms, either alone or together, are applied by the translators only to the Lord, never to men (the Hebrew words are rendered by other words in the King James when applied to people). This is beautifully appropriate, for our gracious God is uniquely the God of love and mercy. In spite of the fact that none of us deserve His lovingkindness or tender mercy, “the LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works” (Psalm 145:8-9). HMM

Monday, January 30

A New Song

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

The theme of singing is frequently found in the Bible. Probably the first song ever sung was by God’s angels at the time of creation as God laid the cornerstone of the earth, “when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

There are nine occasions when a “new song” was to be sung by the people of God. The very first, appropriately, was to extol God’s Word and His creation. “Sing unto him a new song; . . . For the word of the LORD is right,” and then “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made” (Psalm 33:3-6). Then the second new song is placed prophetically on the lips of Christ, representing His thoughts on the cross after His sufferings were finished and He had paid the redemption price for all our sins. “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, . . . And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God” (Psalm 40:2-3).

The next has to do with spreading the good news. “O sing unto the LORD a new song: . . . shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people” (Psalm 96:1-3). The fourth is our text, focusing on Christ’s future coming as King. The next three new songs (Psalms 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10) continue that great theme.

Finally, there are two new songs to be sung by the redeemed in heaven (Revelation 5:9; 14:3). We shall then all be singing to the Lord Jesus Christ: “Thou art worthy . . . : for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10). HMM

Tuesday, January 31

Unbreakable Love

“And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (Genesis 2:23-24)

When the Pharisees asked for His view on divorce, Jesus replied by quoting our text, giving the Creator’s view on marriage and how men and women should approach it if they are to function as they were designed (Matthew 19:4-5). He added, “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (v. 6).

In some special way, known fully only to Him, a man and woman in a marriage relationship can truly become one flesh, just as Adam and Eve were one flesh after Eve had been fashioned from Adam’s side. (Christ’s doctrine of marriage has no logical foundation, by the way, nor do we have any reason to marry if Adam and Eve were not real, specially created people.)

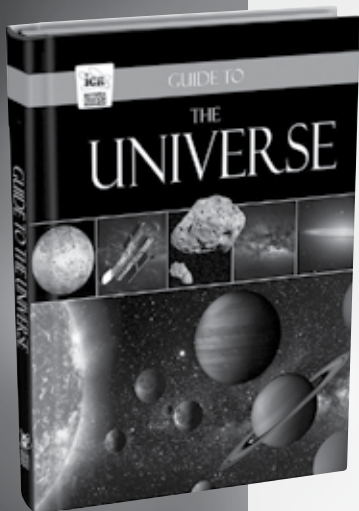
Our text was also quoted by Paul as he more fully explained the marriage doctrine (Ephesians 5:31), prefacing it with a brief discussion of the relationship between the Lord and His Church (v. 30). Just as we are inseparably “members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones,” He designed each of us to be inseparably “one flesh” with his or her spouse.

Paul uses a forceful word for “leave,” meaning to completely leave one’s parents and “be joined” to the spouse. This word is equally forceful and leaves no room for a half-hearted commitment.

Marriage partners, in the eyes of the Creator, should be inseparable, just as the bones and flesh of a body cannot be separated, and just as we cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:35-39). JDM

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Wednesday, February 1

We Soon Fly Away

“For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” (Psalm 90:4)

In this unique psalm, Moses is stressing the brevity of even the longest human life with the everlasting nature of God. In the pre-Flood world, men were able to live many hundreds of years, but no one ever lived as long as 1,000 years. By Moses’ time, the typical lifespan was 70 or 80 years (v. 10), much the same as today. Moses lived to age 120, but he was twice as old as most of his contemporaries when he finally died (note Numbers 14:29, 34; Deuteronomy 34:7).

Moses, therefore, was profoundly impressed with the ephemeral nature of a person’s time on Earth. Even if someone had lived a thousand years, this was only a little while in God’s sight, and his life would soon “fly away” (Psalm 90:10) and be forgotten.

There is nothing in this passage, incidentally, or in 2 Peter 3:8 (“one day is with the Lord as a thousand years”) to justify the misinterpretation that attributes billions of years to God’s creation week. In context (and one must always be sensitive to the context if he wants to understand any passage of Scripture), neither Moses nor Peter were referring to the creation week at all. Moses was stressing the brevity of human life, even that of the antediluvians, while Peter was rebuking the latter-day uniformitarians who would come denying the catastrophic effects of the great Flood. It is too bad that so many Christians are willing to distort Scripture like this in order to accommodate the imaginary ages of evolution.

The message we should really get from this Mosaic observation is the application He Himself makes. “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12)! HMM

Thursday, February 2

God's Presence in Flood and Flame

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” (Isaiah 43:2)

Although this tremendous promise is primarily to be understood in a spiritual sense (deliverance through overflowing sorrows and fiery trials), God has demonstrated His ability to fulfill the spiritual aspects of the promise by its miraculous, literal fulfillment in the physical realm on special occasions. The crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel is an obvious example of safe passage through deep waters.

The amazing experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace is the most spectacular example of deliverance from burning. As the three emerged unscathed from the “exceeding hot” flames, the king was astounded when he “saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them” (Daniel 3:27).

The entire world once was caused to pass through the Flood and one day must be destroyed by the fire (2 Peter 3:6, 10), but “eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:20) as the Flood carried them safely away in Noah's Ark from the violent world of the antediluvians, and all those truly trusting in Christ will be “saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15) when He comes again.

These great experiences of the past and promises of the future assure us that God is able to deliver us through the deep waters and burning trials of this present life. “That the trial of your faith, . . . though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). HMM

Friday, February 3

Joint Heirs with Christ

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Romans 8:16-17)

Modern-day humanists and unbelievers take great sport in belittling Christians, but despite their estimate, and even despite whatever humble view Christians may entertain of themselves, the fact remains that the Bible clearly declares believers to possess a position of preeminent standing and blessing.

Consider the wondrous fact that we as believers are “children of God.” “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). We are His offspring, for “according to his abundant mercy [he] hath begotten us again” (1 Peter 1:3). As His children, we even look like Him, in a spiritual sense, “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), and His Fatherly love surrounds us.

Furthermore, we are the inheritors of all good things, just as a human child can expect to inherit from his or her human father. Christ is the Son of God, but He is also “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). Our inheritance is nothing less than God Himself: all that He is and has is ours, and we will share it all with Christ, our elder brother. “The glory which thou [the Father] gavest me [Christ] I have given them [all believers]” (John 17:22).

This standing and privilege is ours, but we must not forget it is ours as a result of His doing, not our own worth, lest we become prideful. Nevertheless, it is ours. So let us believe it, accept it, and present it in such a way that others will want to share in it. JDM

Saturday, February 4

The Pattern in the Mount

“And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.” (Exodus 25:40)

Nothing that God does is capricious or accidental. A remarkable object lesson of His attention to every detail in the plan of salvation is the tabernacle in the wilderness. The divine blueprint for this structure and its attendants, followed by its construction and dedication, occupy no less than 13 chapters of Exodus. Then the exposition of the symbolical meaning of “the pattern” shown to Moses “in the mount” occupies a major part of three chapters in the book of Hebrews. At least in terms of space allocated to the tabernacle, it seems to constitute the major “type” of the Bible, speaking in many ways of the Lord Jesus Christ. Numerous authors have devoted entire volumes to its exposition. The brazen altar, the laver, the mercy seat, the high priest—all “serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount” (Hebrews 8:5).

The God of the infinite cosmos is also the careful designer of every detail of His tabernacle and every moment of our days. “In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalm 139:16). Just as it was vitally important for the builders of the tabernacle to follow God’s pattern precisely, so it is essential that we also follow His blueprint for our own lives, and that pattern is Christ Himself. “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). If our lives are to speak of Christ, as did the tabernacle, we must “walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). HMM

Sunday, February 5

Working by Faith

“So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.” (Matthew 20:8)

This parable has long caused perplexity, not only among the workers in the parable, but also among readers ever since. Why would the Lord teach that wages paid for a given type of work should be the same for one hour’s work as for 12? His only explanation was that it was the owner’s right to do what he wanted with his own money, and that “the last shall be first, and the first last” (v. 16).

He also pointed out to the complaining workmen that he had completely fulfilled his contract with them. Early in the morning, this group of laborers had negotiated their own terms with him, and “he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day” (v. 2). Those he hired later in the day had said nothing at all about pay, being glad merely to work and willing to trust the lord of the vineyard to treat them fairly. This most probably means that the owner had first approached the early morning workers on the same basis, but they were unwilling to work without a contract negotiated on their own terms.

This is the difference. The first group insisted on a firm contract, and the owner therefore insisted on honoring it. The others worked by faith, trusting in the lord, knowing him to be a man of integrity and justice. Furthermore, they would have been willing to work all day long on this same basis, but they had no opportunity. They needed the job, and the owner, knowing their needs and their willing hearts, decided to pay them on the basis of what they would have done had they had the opportunity.

In any case, the parable surely teaches us that our heavenly rewards are not based on quantity of services rendered but on quality, with full account taken of opportunities, motivation, and trust in the Lord. HMM

Monday, February 6

Beware of Balaam

“O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.” (Micah 6:5)

Three New Testament writers have left us sober warnings concerning Balaam. Peter warned against “the way of Balaam”; Jude against “the error of Balaam”; and John against “the doctrine of Balaam” (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14). God evidently considers these warnings necessary and appropriate for Christians even today. Yet Balaam, in his day, was a genuine prophet (note 2 Peter 2:16), possessed great knowledge concerning God, and even received direct revelations from God. What, therefore, were his way, his error, and his doctrine?

“The way of Balaam” was a readiness to prostitute his high spiritual gifts and privileges for “the wages of unrighteousness” (v. 15); being willing to preach something contrary to God’s Word for personal gain.

“The error of Balaam” was evidently his willingness to compromise his own standards of morality and truth in order “greedily” to accommodate those of his pagan patrons (Jude 1:11). Finally, “the doctrine of Balaam,” which even in John’s day was already infiltrating the church, was to use his own teaching authority to persuade God’s people that it was all right for them also to compromise their standards, even “to commit fornication” (Revelation 2:14) with their idol-worshipping enemies.

The notoriously corrupt state of much that is counterfeit-ing true Christian ministry today is clear evidence that those warnings against “Balaam-ism” are still urgently needed. No wonder Micah (the faithful prophet) urged God’s people to “remember” Balaam and his tragic end (Numbers 31:8). HMM

Tuesday, February 7

Tomorrow

“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” (Proverbs 27:1)

The sin of procrastination may not be one of the so-called “seven deadly sins,” but it may come close if it involves neglecting to do what God has clearly commanded us to do. Sins of omission may well be as serious in many cases as sins of commission. The Bible warns: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

To the professing Christian who deliberately goes against God’s will, either by neglect or intent, Jesus warns: “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luke 12:47). This was spoken in the context of a parable, but the message was clear that it is dangerous to ignore God’s revealed will.

The principle even applies in the secular realm. “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow” (James 4:13-14).

The most dangerous sin of procrastination, of course, is neglecting to come to Christ for forgiveness and salvation. As Paul stressed: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Ignoring God while fully involved in pleasure or business or anything else is at least presumptuous. To the rich man in Christ’s parable who had spent his life concentrating on accumulating goods, God said: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20). We do not know what even one tomorrow may bring, so we need to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5). HMM

Wednesday, February 8

Everything We Need

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” (2 Peter 1:3)

In His wisdom and grace, God has seen to it that we have everything we need to produce “life and godliness.” “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (v. 4). This all-sufficient tool is, of course, the written Word of God, much of which came through the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who in turn claimed it came from God the Father: “For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me” (John 17:8).

Furthermore, the written Word is the source of our faith and the only hope of salvation. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). This Word in which our faith is grounded is forever alive, “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23), and not to be altered, edited, or supplemented. “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life” (Revelation 22:18-19).

Rather, we must live by the words of this book: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

To ensure that the “great and precious promises” regarding “life and godliness” are ours, we must believe, guard, and follow the teachings of this book. “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13). JDM

Thursday, February 9

That Goodly Mountain

“And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.”
(Deuteronomy 3:23-25)

This was the heartfelt prayer of Moses, for he was longing to see the Promised Land that had been his goal for so many years. He knew that God, rebuking his disobedience at Meribah, had said: “Therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:12). Yet, he desired greatly to “go over” the Jordan to see firsthand the “goodly mountain.”

The “goodly mountain” most likely was majestic Mount Hermon, the 9,200-foot, snow-capped peak dominating the southern end of the mountain ranges of Lebanon. God would not allow Moses to enter the land, even though He “shewed him all the land” from the top of Mount Pisgah before he died (Deuteronomy 34:1).

But then, in a marvelous and mysterious way, Moses finally did not only see but stand on Mount Hermon! “And after six days Jesus . . . bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: . . . And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him” (Matthew 17:1-3). There, on the Mount of Transfiguration—that goodly mountain—was Moses, along with Elijah, speaking with Jesus “of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). God had answered his prayer! He had “begun to show” Moses the greatness of His might long ago in Egypt, but now he could see the greatness of His love as Christ prepared to die for his salvation and ours. HMM

Friday, February 10

Abel's Timely Testimony

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” (Hebrews 11:4)

Abel, Adam's second son, was a faithful, God-honoring man, but he was murdered by his older brother, Cain. From Genesis 4 we know that Cain's bloodless sacrifice was not accepted by God, while Abel's animal sacrifice was accepted. Cain's pride, anger, and rejection of God's offer of restoration resulted in the murder of obedient Abel. Our text tells us that Abel “being dead yet speaketh.” What does he say? To whom does he speak?

First of all, he spoke to God. “The voice of thy brother's [Abel's] blood crieth unto me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10). Many have followed Abel in martyrdom, and they all cry, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6:10).

Secondly, he spoke to Cain. “And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand” (Genesis 4:11). Cain was banished by God: “a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” (v. 12), and every spot of ground on which he placed his foot from then on would be crying out to him, indicting him of his sin.

Thirdly, Abel speaks to us. His witness reminds us that men must come to God in obedient faith, for Abel obeyed God's instructions regarding sacrifice (4:3-4). He offered the sacrifice in faith that God would deem him “righteous” (today's text). The acceptance of the blood sacrifice and the rewards of his brother's disobedience speak eloquently of the “wages of sin.” May God give us ears to hear Abel's timely testimony. JDM

Saturday, February 11

The Fear of the Lord

“And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” (Job 28:28)

This key phrase, “the fear of the LORD” (*Yahweh*), occurs in a distinctive pattern in the Old Testament. There are 14 occurrences in the book of Proverbs and seven in the other books, or a total of three times seven altogether, both of which are important Bible numbers.

As we see from the verses in Job preceding our text, when God made man He told him that true wisdom is “the fear of the Lord” (*Adonai*—the only use of *Adonai* with this phrase). Unfortunately, Adam and Eve sought wisdom in the tree of knowledge instead (Genesis 3:6) and soon were hiding themselves in fear. The psalmist testifies: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). The final occurrence of the phrase is also in a wisdom context. “And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure” (Isaiah 33:6).

There are numerous other references to fearing God, and a survey of all these would quickly show that the fear of the Lord is far more than mere “reverential trust,” as some would define it. It means profound awe, intense awareness of God’s hatred of sin, as well as His omniscience and omnipresence, and living in light of the certainty of facing Him at His future judgment seat. It means unquestioning belief in God’s Word and in His unmerited gift of salvation.

But then it also means “the beginning of knowledge,” “to hate evil,” “prolongeth days,” “strong confidence,” “a fountain of life,” and “satisfied,” as well as attaining true “riches and honour” (Proverbs 1:7; 8:13; 10:27; 14:26; 14:27; 19:23; 22:4). “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever” (Psalm 19:9), and those who truly fear the Lord have everlasting life. HMM

Sunday, February 12

The Golden Scepter

“And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near and touched the top of the sceptre.”
(Esther 5:2)

Queen Esther knew she was risking her life when she came unbidden into the presence of the mighty king of Persia in his throne room. Even though she was his favorite wife, he did not know she was a Jew or that she was hoping to get Haman’s terrible order for genocide of the Jews reversed. She knew that it was a capital offense for even a queen to go into the throne room without authorization, and that only the king—by holding out to her his golden scepter—could save her life. But she also knew that she had “come to the kingdom for such a time as this,” and so she said: “If I perish, I perish” (4:14, 16). The king, however, did extend his golden scepter to her, and even said: “What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee” (5:6).

In a beautiful way, this is also a picture of our own coming to Christ, the King of kings. One does not have to be a queen, however, for “whosoever will” may come (Revelation 22:17) if he has the courage to die to the world and the faith to believe that Christ can save. The Lord Jesus Christ graciously says to those who come to Him in faith, believing: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do” (John 14:13).

The invitation is to “whosoever” and the promise is for “whatsoever”! “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). None dared enter the court of the Persian king without being called, but we have been called by our heavenly King, for “a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (1:8). HMM

Monday, February 13

The Only True God

“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” (1 Thessalonians 1:9)

There are “gods many, and lords many” (1 Corinthians 8:5) in today’s world, just as there were in the ancient pagan world. In fact, the worship of many of these ancient deities is being revived in various dark corners of the so-called “New Age” movement today. Idol worship can also involve adulation of men and women—such as music idols, professional athletes, and movie idols, not to mention the humanistic worship of such political/religious leaders as Lenin, Mao, Hitler, Khomeini, and an increasing assortment of gurus and false prophets.

There is, however, only one true God, the God who created all things. “To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him” (v. 6). The one thing all these false gods and false religions have in common is the denial of the true God and omnipotent Creator.

For such idolatry there is no legitimate excuse. “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (v. 4). A dead idol obviously can be of no use. The infallible test as to just who this “true” God may be is that His identity is confirmed as the only living God; therefore, He is the only true God. He died for our sins, yes, but now He lives forever as King of all His creation. We, like the Thessalonians, should turn from all our idols “to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). HMM

Tuesday, February 14

Love and the Heart

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”
(Matthew 22:37)

According to Jesus, this is “the great commandment of the law” and this is also the first verse in the New Testament to associate “love” and the “heart.” This “love,” of course, is not romantic love (the Greek word for *that* love is never used in the New Testament at all), but the divine type of love (Greek *agape*), as in “God so loved the world.”

The “heart” (Greek *kardia*, from which come such English words as cardiology) is mentioned often in the Bible, but almost never means the actual physical organ. It refers to the emotional and spiritual components of man’s nature—“the hidden man of the heart” (1 Peter 3:4). We use “heart” for the same purposes in English. Just how this particular date came to celebrate the heart as a symbol of romantic love and to be called Valentine’s Day is uncertain. There were various emperors, popes, and religious leaders named Valentine in the early history of Christendom, including two Roman Catholics designated as Saint Valentine. In any case, Christians should remember that true Christian *agape* love should be manifested in our lives every day of the year. To that end, “see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22). True Christian love can only be expressed out of a heart that has been made pure. As Paul wrote young Timothy, “Now the end of the commandment is charity [that is, *agape* love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Timothy 1:5).

And remember that, first of all, we must “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30). HMM

Wednesday, February 15

God Is Able

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

The Bible portrays God as omnipotent—all-powerful, able even to create all things from nothing (Hebrews 11:3). The individual is portrayed as totally insufficient to do anything but fail. Yet the Bible also teaches that great things will be done in, and through, and to us. How? It is only through God’s power and wisdom that anything of substance will be accomplished. He alone is able. Consider the following sampling of tasks He is able to perform for us.

God is able to do the work of salvation in a believer’s heart. “Wherefore [God] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). We can entrust that salvation for eternity “unto him that is able to keep [us] from falling, and to present [us] faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24).

In this life we will have physical needs, and included in a passage on the obligation we have to give so that others’ needs will be met is Paul’s claim that “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). Furthermore, He alone is able to equip us for service. “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Timothy 1:12).

His able ministry toward us does not stop in this life, for He “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:21). As our text teaches, He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” JDM

Thursday, February 16

Praise of the Generations

“That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children.” (Psalm 78:6)

Each generation of people tends to regard its own times as the most significant of all, toward which all past history has been merely a preparation. The fact is, however, that God has “been our dwelling place in all generations” (90:1), and He is equally concerned about any generations yet to come.

This is why He stresses repeatedly that the great truths concerning God’s creation, His character, His great work of salvation, and His long-range plans for the ages to come be transmitted faithfully from one generation to another. “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (145:4).

Our modern scientific generation almost idolizes new research, new gadgets, new discoveries. The God of eternity, however, is not so concerned that we develop new ideas as that we not lose what He already has given us. “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth” (119:89-90).

Christ said: “That which ye have already hold fast till I come.” “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Revelation 2:25; 3:11).

The great principle of true education is given by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” The great account of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, especially, is to be taught forever. “They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this” (Psalm 22:31). HMM

Friday, February 17

Humility

“He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. . . . and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.” (John 13:4-5)

The Greek word usually translated humility occurs seven times in the New Testament, implying self-abasement and suggesting a meekness of spirit. In Greek literature, it was used to describe a slave’s demeaning of himself before his master—an outward prostration, not an inward character trait.

The idea that a master would set aside his status and voluntarily become a slave was probably incomprehensible to the world of Jesus’ day. Yet, we are enjoined to “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who . . . took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8). He defined humility by His actions, as in our text, and now we are to voluntarily take up His attitude and “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith [we] are called, With all lowliness [humility] and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Christian humility surpasses all other virtues. Expressing itself as more than acting in a humble fashion, it consists of an inward habit of self-abasement, showing consideration to all others.

This characteristic in God’s eyes is seen as one of great value. “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5-6). JDM

Him That Cometh to Me

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37)

In this verse and the verses to follow, we find Christ using a marvelous teaching technique. Several times He makes a general, generic statement but quickly advances from the general and impersonal to the particular and personal.

Note that at the first, Christ tells of an abstract gift to Him from the Father of an entire group, (“all”) of which should come to Him for salvation. This is in itself a wonderful truth, for Christ highly values this gift from His Father: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father . . . gave them [to] me” (10:28-29). The entire group “shall come” to Him.

But Christ switches in mid-sentence from general to specific: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” a concrete statement of the effect of this work on an individual. We are part of a group, without doubt, but also each one of us individually is His precious child.

The passage continues in the same vein. “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (6:39). Again, the impersonal passes into the personal, for “this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (v. 40).

From the mass of created mankind, many have come to Christ for salvation. But each one who has believed and been granted everlasting life has great individual worth in the eyes of the Savior. “The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. . . . I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (10:11, 14). JDM

Sunday, February 19

Naming Names

“Their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.” (2 Timothy 2:17-18)

Many Christians decry the citing of actual names of those Christian leaders who teach heretical doctrines, saying that such an act is “unloving.” Paul, however, considered it an important evidence of true love to warn against those who would “overthrow the faith of some,” realizing that generalities would be useless.

Not only did Hymenaeus and Philetus make Paul’s list, but so did Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14), the Cretians (Titus 1:12), another Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20), and even Peter (Galatians 2:11-14) when he began to teach legalism. Likewise, John warned against Diotrophes (3 John 1:9) and the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6).

On the other hand, Paul was much more generous with name recognition when he was giving out commendations (e.g., Romans 16:1-15; Colossians 4:7-17). We undoubtedly need to follow his example in appreciating by name those who are faithful in teaching and living the truth.

Likewise, we need to be ready and willing to name those individuals, churches, schools, and other organizations that are denying biblical inerrant authority, compromising the doctrine of special creation, requiring humanistic works for salvation, or bringing in other heretical doctrines. We obviously need to be sure of our facts when we do this and also to bring such charges only if motivated by genuine concern for those apt to be led astray if we don’t speak out. But then we must, indeed, “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). HMM

Monday, February 20

Jesus, Lover of My Soul

“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)

Charles Wesley wove into his lyrics the very words and thoughts of Scripture. Such it is with the deeply moving hymn “Jesus, Lover of My Soul.”

*Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly
While the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Savior, hide, till the storm of life is past;
Safe into Thy harbor guide, O receive my soul at last.*

“Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23). How often do we lean on Jesus’ bosom and partake of that intimate *agape* love? There we find safety both in this life and the life to come, for Jesus Himself “is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), and He asks, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” (John 17:24).

Safe in His arms of love we find shelter from the flood and tempest, “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). “For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat” (Isaiah 25:4).

Jesus, the lover of the soul, paid the ultimate sacrifice and is even now preparing an eternal safe haven for you and me, the objects of His love. He promised, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). JDM

Tuesday, February 21

In the Shadow of His Wings

*“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”
(Isaiah 41:10)*

Verse two of “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” deals with life’s trials and tribulations and begins by presenting our Savior as “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

*Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, oh, leave me not alone; still support and comfort me.
All my trust on Thee is stayed, all my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head with the shadow of Thy wing.*

We may be helpless on our own, but in love He beckons us to “the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Our soul need not hang in jeopardy. “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee . . . we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man may do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

“There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:26-27). Help from none other is needed. “Thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory and the lifter up of mine head” (Psalm 3:3). As His sacrificial death drew near, Jesus’ heart nearly broke over Israel’s rejection of His love. “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matthew 23:37). We dare not reject His loving provision. We can pray with David, “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings” (Psalm 17:8). The one to whom we pray will answer, for He is Jesus, the lover of the soul. JDM

Wednesday, February 22

Thou, O Christ, Art All I Want

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” (Isaiah 26:3)

The touching stanzas of the old hymn “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” reveal Charles Wesley’s response of love to Christ’s gracious love. Verse three seems to reflect the walk of a believer who desires a full and fruitful oneness with Christ.

*Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint, heal the sick, and lead
the blind.*

*Just and holy is Thy name, I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am; Thou art full of truth and grace.*

Paul’s prayer for his growing converts was “that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19). He stated his own testimony thus: “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).

Christ lovingly came to “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils” (Matthew 10:8). He didn’t just do this for those who followed Him but for those who needed it, whether or not they responded in love, and indeed before long those whom He had befriended turned on Him and demanded He die a sinner’s execution. But He was sinless—“The Word was made flesh . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Even though He had the power to avoid Calvary, His love was so great that He willingly accepted a sacrificial death for those who sent Him there. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). Truly, He is the lover of the soul. JDM

Thursday, February 23

The Fountain of Life

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22:17)

The fourth verse of “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” speaks of the mature Christian’s desire for purity and victory over sin and looks forward to the ultimate victory in eternity.

*Plenteous grace with Thee is found, grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound; make and keep me pure
within.*

*Thou of life the fountain art, freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart; rise to all eternity.*

Our maturing in Christ begins at the time of repentance and forgiveness, and no matter the depth of our sin, His love can conquer it, for “the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. . . . Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:14-15). Indeed, “the blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. . . . And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:1, 3). Thus, His gracious love for us becomes the agent of pure living in our lives.

The love of Jesus Christ is like “a well of living waters” (Song of Solomon 4:15). This well is freely open to all, as we see in our text. Jesus, the lover of the soul, who says “come,” also says, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). JDM

Friday, February 24

Witnesses of the Trinity

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here am I; send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

In this passage we see, perhaps, a hint of the triune nature of the Godhead. It is as if God the Father is inquiring of God the Son and God the Spirit as to whom other than one of them would be an effective representative for them. Isaiah, in his freshly forgiven and purified state (vv. 6-7), offers to accept the commission and represent the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. A similar call is issued to each of us today.

Elsewhere in Scripture we are told more plainly of the fullness of our call to represent God the Father: “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour” (Isaiah 43:10-11).

Likewise, God the Son called us to be “witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Conversely, we are not called to be witnesses of the Holy Spirit; rather, we are to be co-witnesses with Him of Jesus Christ. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27). “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (16:13-14).

What a privilege! What a message! What a Partner! JDM

Saturday, February 25

Jesus and the Charge of Blasphemy

“Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.” (Mark 14:64)

Today many liberal theologians profess to be Christians but argue that Jesus was merely a great man and that He never claimed deity for Himself. But the Sanhedrin and its high priest had no such doubts for they heard it from His own lips.

When the high priest asked him directly: “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus (silent up to that point in His own defense) answered him plainly. “I am,” He said, “and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

The council immediately voted to condemn Him to death, since blasphemy was considered a capital crime. Two members of the body, Joseph and Nicodemus, had evidently already left, probably because of dismay at what the council was doing (note Luke 23:51; John 7:50-51), but the rest of that august body all agreed.

Jesus had already claimed in various indirect ways to be uniquely the Son of God, but this assertion, made in front of all the elders and scribes, was unequivocal and completely clear, giving them the excuse they needed.

They did not believe His claim, of course, but they certainly knew He had made it and that it constituted blatant blasphemy—a mere man claiming to be the omnipotent, eternal God. So, they condemned Him to die.

But it was only blasphemy if it was untrue. He would demonstrate just three days later, once and for all, that His claim was absolute truth. Only the Creator of life could triumph over death, and He has been “declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). His tomb is empty and He has ascended back to the throne of God, “alive for evermore” (Revelation 1:18). HMM

Shadows of His Presence

“And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” (Isaiah 32:2)

In the context of this beautiful verse, the “man” is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. To one who had been traveling in the heat of the desert, such as the Sinai wilderness, nothing was so welcome as the cool shadows behind a great rock in which one could rest for a while from the hardships of the wearying land. The symbol of the shadow is often used in the Old Testament to illustrate the refreshing presence of the Lord.

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1). Wherever His loved ones go, He is there, and our dwelling place is there in His shadow.

There is safety there, also. “Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice” (63:7). “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust” (91:4). He is the great Eagle as well as the great Rock, and finally also the great Tree. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song of Solomon 2:3).

The shadow of a great rock in a weary land, the shadow of the wings of a great eagle, the shadow of a delightful fruit tree, all of these speak beautifully of the refreshing, protecting, satisfying shadow of His presence. These are the shadows of the Almighty God, who made heaven and Earth, and now holds us in His hand. “I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people” (Isaiah 51:16). HMM

Monday, February 27

Both Together

“And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.” (Genesis 22:6)

The familiar story of Abraham’s willingness to offer up Isaac his son, in obedience to God’s command, is rightly cited as a prime example of Abraham’s great faith. It is also a testimony to the remarkable faith of Isaac, for it is recorded twice in Genesis 22 that “they went both of them together” (see also v. 8).

This emphasis on the fellowship of both father and son in this tremendous act of obedient faith is surely given by divine inspiration for our edification.

Isaac was a grown young man at this time, not a little boy. Isaac soon understood what was happening, yet he willingly carried the wood himself and then submitted to being bound on the altar of sacrifice. Abraham fully intended to slay his son (and Isaac to allow himself to be slain), for they understood this to be God’s Word. Actually, however, God had commanded Abraham only to “offer him there for a burnt offering” (v. 2) and, when he did that, God stayed his hand, and provided a ram as a substitute for his son.

The New Testament, of course, makes it clear (see Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 11:17-19) that this was a beautiful type of the mutual love-gift of the heavenly Father and His beloved Son, providing salvation for all who would receive it by faith. They went both together to the cross!

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). The Father loved the Son before the world began (John 17:24), but they both loved us so much that they both went to the place of sacrifice, together, for us! HMM

Take Heed Therefore

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

On his way back to Jerusalem, Paul decided not to stop at Ephesus, fearing a lengthy delay. But this church was much on his heart, and he recognized that he might not see them again. In order to give them one last bit of instruction and encouragement, he called the elders to meet with him, where they had a most touching time together (vv. 30-38). What was Paul’s main concern? “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember” (vv. 29-31).

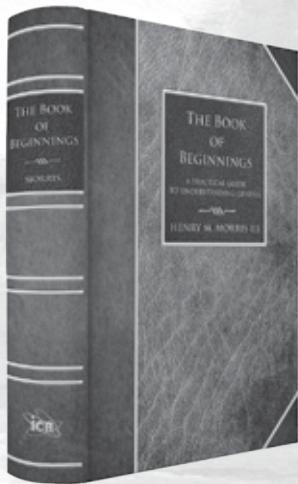
Later, Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus, “that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3). The Greek word used here means “a different kind of doctrine” and is used only twice. Certainly, the false doctrine that concerned Paul the most was a works-oriented salvation. “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Galatians 1:6).

Paul also concerned himself with lifestyle. “If any man teach otherwise [same word], and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness . . . from such withdraw thyself” (1 Timothy 6:3, 5). The list of characteristics of the false teachers given (vv. 4-5) contrasts markedly with those resulting from proper doctrine and life, “charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1:5). May our lives be characterized by these qualities. JDM

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