

Days of Praise



June • July • August 2020

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

June • July • August 2020

*“The wilderness and the solitary place shall be
glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice,
and blossom as the rose.”*

(Isaiah 35:1)

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

*“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.”
(2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)*

Dear Christian friend,

From time to time the world needs reminding that there is a God in heaven who is able to issue judgment and at the same time bring comfort to His children. Much of what we go through is beyond our control. Yet, it is also abundantly clear that our Lord Jesus has provided “everlasting consolation” for us during any peril or calamity that may befall the world at large.

As always, these devotional thoughts are given from our hearts to our readers, anticipating with each thought that we can “stir up your pure minds” (2 Peter 3:1) each day and focus on the eternal things that never fade away. I trust that they are helpful and encouraging to you.

Although we don’t often have the privilege to know you personally, we do ask our heavenly Father to care for those who read these little devotionals. May God’s blessing be with you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

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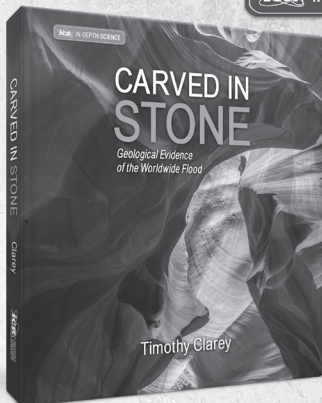
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Monday, June 1

The Finished Works of Creation

“For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.” (Hebrews 4:3)

Here is a strong New Testament confirmation of the Genesis record of a creation completed in the past—thus not continuing in the present as theistic evolutionists have to assume. Whatever processes God may have used during the six days of creation, they are no longer in operation, for “the heavens and the earth were finished,...on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made....And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:1-3).

The record in Genesis could not be more clear and specific, but the fact that it is in Genesis tends to demean it in the minds of many scientists and theologians. So, they prefer to believe in a continuing evolution and long ages in the past. But the writer of Hebrews once again confirms the fact of a completed creation: “For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:10).

The writer is not trying to defend the completed creation as such but merely assuming it as a commonly acknowledged truth. In fact, God’s “rest” from His works of creation is taken as a prophetic type of the spiritual rest of a Christian believer when he ceases trusting his own works of legalism and relies fully on the finished work of Christ for his eternal salvation. On the cross, before the Lord had died for our sins, He had cried out, “It is finished” (John 19:30), and our debt for sin was fully paid. God’s great work of redemption was completed, just as was His work of creation, and now we also can rest from our “dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14). HMM

Tuesday, June 2

Let Him Hear

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

It makes an eternal difference whether a person hears—yet doesn't hear—or really hears what he hears, especially when God speaks! In Christ's seven letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2 and 3), representing all churches, each letter concludes with His words in our text. How important it is to really hear when He speaks!

First of all, when we truly hear His call, He gives salvation. “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). Then, if we have really become His sheep, we will hear His voice and follow Him as He leads. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). “He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out” (John 10:3). Also, if we really hear when He speaks through His Word, we will do what He says. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24).

The voice of the Lord can even raise the dead: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth” (John 5:28-29). Now, if even those who have died physically can hear Him, surely He is able also to quicken those who are spiritually dead if they will only listen as He calls. But it is necessary that they hear! “To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke....whose carcasses fell in the wilderness....So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:15-19). “He that hath an ear, let him hear!” HMM

Wednesday, June 3

Good Affliction

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.” (Psalm 119:71)

This seems like a strange testimony. Affliction is often accompanied by complaining or discouragement, but seldom by a statement of satisfaction and thankfulness such as in our text for today.

Nevertheless, in terms of the long-range goal of character development, afflictions are often good for us, helping to make us more Christ-like and preparing us for our ministry of service to Him in the age to come (Revelation 22:3), if only we profit from them and submit to them as we should.

“Before I was afflicted I went astray,” testifies the psalmist, “but now have I kept thy word....This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me” (Psalm 119:67, 50). Such testimonies have been echoed innumerable times throughout the centuries as godly men and women have drawn closer to the Lord through His comforting Word during times of affliction than they ever were during times of ease.

In fact, afflictions often draw even the unsaved to the Lord. They would never come when things are going well, but many do come when in times of sorrow or rejection they are forced to the end of their resources. It is then that “godly sorrow [literally ‘sorrow from God’] worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

As for those instances when God’s people suffered in ancient times, it was said: “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them” (Isaiah 63:9). Although no such affliction “for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11). HMM

Thursday, June 4

That Ye Might Believe

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But 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 20:30-31)

The gospel of John is the one book of the Bible specifically written with the purpose of leading people to Jesus Christ and salvation. It is structured around seven specially selected miracles of creation, or “signs” (John 2:11; 4:53-54; 5:9; 6:13-14; 6:19-21; 9:6-7; 11:43-45), each requiring supernatural power as well as knowledge. The book also contains many affirmations of His deity (there are seven great “I am” statements) and many exhortations to believe on Him (e.g., John 3:16) interspersed around the seven signs. Finally, there is the detailed description of the last supper, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, climaxed by the glorious affirmation of faith by doubting Thomas, and then our text stating the purpose of the entire book.

If we are to be effective witnesses for Christ, we can do no better than follow this same procedure. It is most significant that this begins with a strong emphasis on the special creation of all things, with an exposition showing that Christ Himself is the Creator (John 1:1-14). The judicious use of Christian evidences (e.g., the miracles) demonstrating the truth of His many claims of deity, climaxed by the overwhelming proofs of His own bodily resurrection (John 20:1-29), all interwoven with an uncompromising emphasis on the inerrant authority of Scripture (e.g., John 5:39-47; 10:34-36) and a clear exposition of His substitutionary death and the necessity of personal faith in Him for salvation (especially John 3:1-18), all combine to make the most effective way of bringing people to an intelligent, well-grounded decision to receive Christ as Savior and Lord. HMM

Friday, June 5

Mary and the Grace of God

“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.” (Luke 1:30)

This announcement by the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary, that she had been chosen as the mother of the coming Savior, contains the first mention in the New Testament of the Greek word for grace (*charis*). Mary was chosen, not for anything she had done, but because she had “found grace.”

In a remarkable parallel, certainly implying divine inspiration, the first mention of grace in the Old Testament is also associated with the coming of a new dispensation in God’s dealings with men. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8).

Just as Mary found grace, so Noah had found grace. Grace is not something one earns or purchases; grace is a treasure that is found! When a person finally realizes that salvation is only by the grace of God, received through faith in the saving work of Christ, he or she has made the greatest discovery that could ever be made, for it brings eternal life.

But there is an even greater dimension to the grace of God. When we do “find” grace, it is actually because God in His infinitely precious grace has found us and revealed to us the Savior of our souls. Just as God found Moses in the desert and found Paul on the road to Damascus, then saved and called them to His service, so He finds us, and then we also find His saving grace.

Mary’s discovery of God’s grace in salvation, through the coming of the “seed of the woman” into the world, is revealed in her Magnificat: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46-47). This could well have also been the testimony of Noah long ago, and it surely should be the testimony of each of us who has found grace today. HMM

Doctrines of Devils

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” (1 Timothy 4:1)

In chapter one of his first epistle to Timothy, Paul warned about false teachers and heresies in the church of his day, evidently particularly implicating the agnostics and their false skepticism and low moral standards. In our text for today and throughout chapter four, he warns of false teachers “in the latter times,” i.e., in our day and in our churches.

Paul had received an explicit (i.e., “express”) teaching from the Holy Spirit. There was nothing vague about it. The false teachers would, among other things, be “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats” (v. 3), with other false teachings implied throughout the chapter. What does this teach us about those who today forbid their leaders, both men and women, to marry? Or those who insist upon certain dietary regimes for spiritual reasons?

These “doctrines” will cause some to “depart from the faith.” Evidently, some who consider themselves Christians and yet have incomplete discernment will fall into the trap of “seducing spirits,” espousing the “doctrines of devils.” The Greek word translated “depart” is *apostesontai*, which means “to fall away” from an original position, in this case “the faith.” The teachers will typically be hypocrites, “speaking lies,” having “their conscience seared” (v. 2). “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:9).

In this time of great apostasy, we desperately need to know the biblical doctrine concerning devils (or Satan and his demonic henchmen), for their influence has nearly captured American education and culture. We must be on guard against, and teach others to be on guard against, “doctrines of devils.” JDM

Sunday, June 7

No Other Gods

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)

This first commandment, written by the finger of God Himself on Mount Sinai—twice (Exodus 31:18; 34:1)—contains a very intriguing choice of words.

“Thou shalt have no” is rendered from the Hebrew word *lo*, which is an emphatic negative: “never,” “neither,” “not,” etc. The word “other” translates the Hebrew word *acher*, which is derived from another word meaning “behind” or “less.” This word is also translated “following,” “next,” “[an]other,” or “strange”—in the sense of being less than the previous object. *Elohim* is the Hebrew word for “gods,” the term for “powerful ones.”

The Holy Spirit’s most unusual choice of words is the phrase *‘al paniym* at the end of the sentence, translated “before me.” That phrase literally means “against the faces” or in the sense of “on top of.” So, a direct translation of the command would be “Never place a less powerful being on top of my faces.” It can also be rendered “Don’t ever let any other god get between your face and my face.”

Moses gave several instructions on how we are to observe the command. We are not to worship (prostrate, bow down to) any other god (Exodus 34:14), or mention (call to memory) the name of other gods (Exodus 23:13), or walk behind other gods (Deuteronomy 6:14). We are not to forget (mislay, be oblivious of) *YAHWEH* and in so doing serve other gods (Deuteronomy 8:18-19). We must not allow our hearts to be deceived (become broad, liberal, “open”-minded) and worship other gods (Deuteronomy 11:16). And we are not to go aside (turn off, withdraw) from the words of God and by doing so serve other gods (Deuteronomy 28:14).

No wonder our Lord Jesus called this the “first and great commandment” and insisted that we must “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” (Matthew 22:37-38). HMM III

No Other Image

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing.” (Exodus 20:4)

There are several reasons why idolatry is forbidden. The most obvious is that the triune Creator is too great to attempt to visualize (Exodus 34:5-7). There is no thing or experience in human existence that can represent the immortal and invisible Creator (1 Timothy 6:16).

Thus, God sees any effort to “picture” Him (idolatry) as rebellion (Jeremiah 5:19-25). It does not matter how we may attempt to “see” God. “Any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:4) are all totally incapable of expressing God’s person.

Romans 1:18-32 reveals the heart of an idolater. Those who hold the truth in unrighteousness (v. 18) will not glorify God as God (v. 21), even though they know Him by the creation itself (v. 20). Instead, they change God’s inestimable glory into an earthly creature (v. 23) and consciously change God’s truth into a lie (v. 25).

Thus, by open choice and willing rebellion, idolators worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator (v. 25), thereby abandoning God for a despicable and unnatural lust, for an ungodliness that, in turn, causes them to despise the very thought of God in their knowledge (v. 28). Ultimately, the only pleasure they can find is among other idolators (v. 32).

Paul taught the “philosophers” in Acts 17:22-29 that the heart of idolatry is rejection of God as Creator. Idolatry, in any form or practice, strikes at the heart of salvation, because “he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

HMM III

Tuesday, June 9

God's Precious Name

*"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain."
(Exodus 20:7)*

As always, the word choices of the Holy Spirit are very important. The Hebrew word *nasa*, translated "take," is widely used to describe willful misuse or manipulation of an item or idea. The Hebrew word for "name," *shem*, literally means "a position" and carries the idea of a mark or memorial, implying a description of character.

God proclaimed His name: "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:6-7). Moses described God as "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Misusing the name of God is clarified by the final phrase "in vain," translated from the Hebrew *shav*, which describes "a desolation, an evil, a useless or worthless thing." "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:12).

Thus, making a false (untrue, unrealistic, unmeant) statement using God's name is wrong (Jeremiah 5:1-3; Matthew 5:33-37). Also, wounding the name of God through words or actions is equally wrong (Leviticus 20:1-5). A bad testimony (Ezekiel 36:20-23), improper service (Ezekiel 20:39-40), or giving the second-best to God (Malachi 1:10-14) disobeys this commandment.

Clearly, this is no mere restraint against "cussing." It demands open worship of the nature and attributes of the Creator through our words and our lifestyle. HMM III

Wednesday, June 10

God's Rest Day

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Exodus 20:8)

The Hebrew word *shabbat* is found 108 times in the Old Testament. The basic meaning is "intermission" or "break." The term never means "Saturday" or "seven."

The pattern of resting every seventh day–night cycle was established by God at creation (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:11). God "made" (performed activity) for six days and rested and ended His work on the seventh day.

Therefore, God blessed and "hallowed" the resting day to commemorate His initial work and rest cycle. There is no other basis for this pattern. There is no relationship for the seven-day week in any astronomical clock reference: solar, stellar, or lunar. In fact, the Lord Jesus clearly told us that He made the sabbath for humanity (Mark 2:27). Apart from God's specific design, we would have no reason to observe the seven-day week, which is common to all cultures.

All humanity observes the seven-day cycle from a practical and physiological need. Christians, however, should acknowledge that the sabbath was dedicated by God at creation to be a day of "sanctification."

God's people should follow the pattern He set (Genesis 2:1-3) and recognize the wonder and majesty of the creation (Exodus 20:11). We should cease from our own profitable employment (Exodus 20:9-10) and, more importantly, concentrate on the worship of our Creator (Psalm 92).

This commandment is the only command listed with a specific reason, and the precise wording should forever settle the argument about a "day age" interpretation of creation. In Exodus 20:11, the wording can only mean a "regular" day. There is no linguistic excuse for long ages anywhere. HMM III

Thursday, June 11

Honoring Parents

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” (Exodus 20:12)

This is the “first commandment with promise” (Ephesians 6:2) and starts the second set of instructions in Exodus 20 for godly living. While the first four commandments focus on our relationship with God Himself, the last six are designed to protect and enhance our relationship with each other.

Among all human relationships, the family becomes the primary sphere (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:21-25; Ephesians 6:1-2) for learning. Human government and nationality have their place in our relationships between and among each other, but the home is the basic training station (Genesis 18:19; Ephesians 6:4) to establish functional authority.

The home is the place to exercise the discipline that will instill respect for authority (Hebrews 12:5-11). Such discipline may involve corporal punishment (Proverbs 22:15; 23:13-14) or verbal rebuke (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12) or even involve the withholding of reward or privilege (Genesis 49:1-26). Government struggles and society reels when homes are negligent in establishing obedience to rules.

The promise of a long life is based upon children obeying their parents (Proverbs 6:20) and helping their parents as they require care or assistance in their later years (1 Timothy 5:8, 16).

The Lord Jesus submitted Himself to this authority (Luke 2:51). Since He lived a sinless life (Hebrews 4:15), it would follow that He upheld this commandment and honored His earthly parents just as He honored His heavenly Father.

The honor given to parents is even extended to all elderly people (Leviticus 19:32). Would God these instructions were followed by all families. HMM III

No Murder

“Thou shalt not kill.” (Exodus 20:13)

The basis for murder is hatred (Deuteronomy 19:11; Exodus 21:14). The use of a weapon identifies murder. It may be a lethal weapon, like an “instrument of iron” (Numbers 35:16); a weapon of opportunity, like a stone or club (Numbers 35:17-18); or merely the use of hands (Numbers 35:21).

In contrast, accidental killing is distinguished from murder (Exodus 21:13). Sometimes identified as “unaware” killing (Deuteronomy 4:42) and described as “error” killing (Numbers 35:11), it occurs without enmity (Numbers 35:22; Deuteronomy 19:14; Joshua 20:5) and by accident (Numbers 35:23), even though it may result from carelessness (Deuteronomy 19:5).

Execution is demanded for premeditated and presumptuous murders. The original authority was given to corporate man by God after the Flood (Genesis 9:5-6). The process of trial and conviction was established in Numbers 35:30-31. All such laws are designed to suppress evil (1 Timothy 1:8-10).

Imprisonment from normal society is demanded for accidental killings. Cities of refuge were built for such manslayers (Joshua 20:1-9) and were to be easily accessible to the nation (Deuteronomy 19:7-8). They were places of protection (Numbers 35:15) and restriction (Numbers 35:26-28), to be voluntarily entered (Exodus 21:13; Numbers 35:11). Imprisonment was for an indefinite length, and a person remained in the refuge until the “death of the high priest” (Joshua 20:6).

Modern laws dimly reflect these ideals but are made less effective by delay. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11). HMM III

Saturday, June 13

No Adultery

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14)

This commandment’s obvious application is for marital fidelity. God created one man and one woman for that union (Genesis 1:26; 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:9).

Adam recognized the sanctity of marriage (Genesis 2:23-25). Christ verified and reaffirmed this fidelity (Matthew 5:27; 19:4-6). Adultery “murders” a marriage and was punished with the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10).

The Bible also gives several parallel restrictions. Pre-marital sex is forbidden (Deuteronomy 22:20-21; 1 Corinthians 6:13-18), as is the practice of prostitution (Leviticus 19:29). The perversion of homosexuality is forbidden (Deuteronomy 23:17-18), as is the practice of religious sexual rites (Hosea 4:12-14).

The purpose of these social restrictions in the Mosaic Law is to set a clear and visible distinction between God’s people and the rest of the nations. God abhorred such behavior (Leviticus 20:23) because these sins defiled the land (Leviticus 18:24-28). Perhaps even more damning than the physical sins was the false worship of other gods (Jeremiah 3:20).

The Lord Jesus clearly equated lust and adultery (Matthew 5:28), noting that the heart is the source of all evil actions (Matthew 15:19). In fact, in the New Testament any worldly association is whoredom and such friendship is enmity with God (James 4:4).

Unfortunately, we are surrounded by an overt promotion of such behavior, enticing all to engage freely. It is distributed to us through books, movies, TV, internet, music, fashion, and other venues. Surely, it is clear that the Christian must conform to biblical standards, not the world’s tolerance or permission (1 John 2:15-17). HMM III

No Stealing

“Thou shalt not steal.” (Exodus 20:15)

The word translated “steal” is the Hebrew *ganab* and is restricted to acts done secretly. It figuratively describes wind sweeping something away unexpectedly (Job 21:18; 27:20) and illustrates the thief-like movements of military deserters (2 Samuel 19:4). It would fit the term “burglary.”

Burglary was punishable on a graded scale. A 200-percent penalty was levied if the property was returned unharmed (Exodus 22:4, 7, 9), a 400- or 500-percent penalty if the property was damaged or destroyed (Exodus 22:1), and a 700-percent penalty if the property stolen was food (Proverbs 6:30-31). Personal indenture was enforced if the thief could not pay the monetary levy (Exodus 22:3).

The command extends to our care of the property of others. Loss due to negligence is considered stealing (Exodus 22:7, 10-13). This would also apply to unfair business practices that defraud either customers or employees (Leviticus 19:35-36).

In our personal lives, we are expected to repay our debts (Ezekiel 33:15; 18:7, 12, 16) and pay our taxes (Romans 13:5-8; Matthew 22:17-21). Failure to do so makes us a “thief” in God’s eyes.

The Hebrew word *qaba*, on the other hand, is used to emphasize the violent seizing of property. It would fit the term “robbery.” This is the word used in the question “Will a man rob God?” (Malachi 3:8). We can infer that disobedience to tithing is a more dangerous infraction of the eighth commandment than mere “burglary.” May God keep us from either violation as we seek to please Him. HMM III

Monday, June 15

No False Witness

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”
(Exodus 20:16)

There are several important and very specific words used in this commandment. An expanded translation could well be “Do not purposely intend to injure or plan to deceive others by repeating a damaging report about one with whom you have established a relationship.”

The very idea of a lie originated with the great enemy, Satan (John 8:44; 1 John 2:21), no doubt rendering the lying tongue an abomination to God (Proverbs 6:17-19; 12:22).

The willing false witness will not escape punishment (Proverbs 19:5, 9). Indeed, such a person may die prematurely (Acts 5:4-10).

Untruth is not overlooked by God. In fact, those who are “liars” by practice will likely wind up in hell (Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:15).

While the focus of this commandment prohibits a “formal” false witness against someone—which would result in damage to their person, property, or reputation—the biblical applications are many and varied. Our holy God hates a false witness.

So-called “half truths” are not godly, either. Flattery and hypocrisy are wrong (Psalm 12:1-3; Proverbs 29:5), as are malicious joking and jesting (Proverbs 26:18-19; Ephesians 5:4). Even deceptive refusals are considered ungodly behavior (Proverbs 3:27-29; 1 John 3:17-18). And, of course, slander, gossip, and “tale bearing” are wrong (Psalm 101:5).

Those who name the name of Jesus Christ are, simply, to speak the truth (Ephesians 4:25), render sound judgment (1 Corinthians 6:1-5), and not to enter into a plot to do evil (Zechariah 7:9-10; Romans 12:9, 17, 21). Our “yes” and our “no” are to be precise and accurate (James 5:12). HMM III

No Coveting

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.” (Exodus 20:17)

This is the broadest prohibition of the Ten Commandments, spilling over to numerous portions of the Scripture. This commandment gives us three different views of “covet.” The initial commandment (Exodus 20:17) uses the Hebrew word *chamad*, which means “to delight in.” The repeated commandment (Deuteronomy 5:21) uses the word *‘avah*, which translates “to wish for.” And the applied commandment (Jeremiah 6:13) uses the word *batsa’*, which is “to be greedy.”

There are two classic examples from which we can learn. In spite of the awesome evidence of the Red Sea crossing, water from the rock, and the manna from heaven, Israel was not satisfied with the Lord’s provision (Numbers 11:7-15). They “fell a lusting” (*‘avah*) for the old delicacies of Egypt (Numbers 11:4-6). The Lord gave Israel its request for “meat” (Numbers 11:16-31), then sent a plague of judgment on the ungrateful nation (Numbers 11:32-35).

There is also the tragic example of Achan (Joshua 7). Achan had been warned twice (Deuteronomy 7:25; Joshua 6:18-19) not to crave the riches of Jericho. But he gave into “a delightful desire” (*chamad*, Joshua 7:21). Achan’s sin brought judgment upon the whole nation (Joshua 7:5-15) until he was executed (Joshua 7:25-26).

God does not tolerate covetousness. The Bible is clear: Those who covet are never satisfied (Psalm 78:23-37) and have leanness sent to their souls (Psalm 106:13-15). May our Lord protect us from giving in to the “lust of the flesh” (1 John 2:16). HMM III

Wednesday, June 17

Pleasing God

“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Paul’s great ambition was to please his Lord and Savior. In our text, the Greek for “accepted” often also is translated “well pleasing,” and this is the real meaning of the word. Since this also is the great desire of every sincere Christian, let us look at a few of those passages where the Lord tells us specifically how we can please Him.

Consider, for example: “But to do good and to communicate [i.e., to ‘share what you have with others’] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16; see also Philippians 4:18).

There is a special admonition to children: “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Colossians 3:20). For adults: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please [same root word] him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

The same word appears in Romans 12:1-2, translated twice as “acceptable.” Paul urges us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, “holy, acceptable unto God,” being “not conformed to this world” but transformed by a renewed mind, thereby to prove “that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

The common thread in these and other such passages is that in order to be pleasing to the Lord, we must be good stewards of all our possessions and all our days, serving Him totally. “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable [i.e., ‘well pleasing’] to God” (Romans 14:18). This is our reasonable service, and it will be abundantly repaid if we hear Him say in that day: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). HMM

Created

“Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.” (Isaiah 43:7)

There are three main verbs used to describe God’s work of creation in Genesis. These are “create” (Hebrew *bara*), “make” (*asah*), and “form” (*yatsar*). The three words are similar in meaning but each with a slightly different emphasis. None of them, of course, can mean anything at all like “evolve” or “change” on their own accord.

All three are used in Genesis with reference to humans. “And God said, Let us make man in our image....So God created man in his own image....And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground” (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7).

Although the subject of creation is commonly associated with Genesis, it is mentioned even more frequently by the great prophet Isaiah. The words *bara* and *yatsar* are used twice as often in Isaiah as in any other Old Testament book and are applied uniquely to works of God. All three verbs are used together in Isaiah 45:18 in order to adequately describe God’s purposeful work in preparing Earth for humans: “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.”

God created, formed, made, and established the earth that it might be the home of men and women. But what was God’s purpose for the people who would inhabit it? Our text answers this most fundamental of questions, and once again all three key verbs are used: “I have created him...I have formed him,...I have made him...for my glory.”

This biblical perspective alone provides the greatest of all possible incentives to live a godly and useful life. The reason we were created is to glorify God! HMM

Friday, June 19

Useless Prayers

“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” (Proverbs 28:9)

There are some prayers that God hates, strange as that may seem. In fact, our very prayers can even “become sin” (Psalm 109:7). When one who has deliberately “turned away his ear” from the Word of God (preferring his own way to God’s revealed will as found in His Word) attempts to ask God for blessing or direction, his prayer becomes presumption. God hates such prayers, and those who pray them should not be surprised when He does not give them their request. “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

No Christian is sinless, of course. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). The obvious remedy is to ask the Lord, through His Word, to “see if there be any wicked way in me” (Psalm 139:24), and then to confess and forsake any sin so revealed and known. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Then, having been cleansed from our unrighteousness, we are again made righteous, not only through Christ’s imputed righteousness, but also in righteous, daily living. Then the gracious promises of answered prayer can again become wholly effective, for “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

How vital it is to know and obey the Word of God, and how dangerous it is to turn our ears away from it. God will not be mocked for long! “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). HMM

Saturday, June 20

Defending the Gospel

“But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:17)

Many Christians decry the use of apologetics or evidences in Christian witnessing, feeling it somehow dishonors the Lord or the Scriptures to try to defend them. But as our text indicates, Paul did not agree with this. The gospel does need defending, and he was set for its defense against the attacks of its adversaries. He also told his disciples that “in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace” (Philippians 1:7).

The Greek word translated “defense” is *apologia*, from which we derive our English word “apologetics.” It is a legal term, meaning the case made by a defense attorney on behalf of a defendant under attack by a prosecutor. Thus, Paul is saying: “I am set to give an apologetic for the gospel—a logical, systematic [scientific, if necessary] defense of the gospel against all the attacks of its adversaries.”

Since we are “partakers” with him in this defense, we also need to “be ready always to give an answer [same word, *apologia*] to every man that asketh [us] a reason of the hope that is in [us]” (1 Peter 3:15). Any Christian who shares his faith with the unsaved has encountered many who cannot believe the simple plan of salvation until his questions are answered. We must be familiar with the “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3) of the deity of Christ and His power to save, both as omnipotent Creator and sin-bearing Savior. We must “search the scriptures daily” and also study the “witness” He has given in the creation (Acts 17:11; 14:17) if we are to do this effectively, bringing forth fruit that will “remain” (John 15:16) instead of fruit that has withered away “because it had no root” (Mark 4:6). The gospel is under vicious attack today, so may God help us to be among its victorious defenders. HMM

Sunday, June 21

Love of the Father for the Son

“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.” (John 3:35)

The gospel of John, in a special sense, emphasizes the love in the divine Trinity of the heavenly Father for the Son. The words “love” and “Father” and “Son” occur more in this book than in any other book of the Bible, and there are at least eight references to this love in John’s gospel.

The first is in our text above, revealing that the Father has entrusted the care of the whole creation to the Son whom He loves. He has also shown Him everything in creation: “For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth” (John 5:20).

The Father also loved the Son because of His willingness to die for lost sinners. “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again” (John 10:17).

Then in the upper room, as Christ prayed to His Father, it was revealed that this divine love had existed in eternity and therefore must be both the root and the measure of all forms of true love ever since. “Father...thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Parental love, marital love, filial love, love of country—all types of genuine love—are derived ultimately from this eternal love of the Father for the Son.

And it is this love that can also be in us, if we will have it. “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you...If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:9-10).

It was thus He prayed (and still prays) for us: “That the world may know that thou...hast loved them, as thou hast loved me....And...that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:23, 26). HMM

Higher Ground

*“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 3:13-14)*

Over the years, Christians have used many hymns to enhance the study of Scripture. Consider one such hymn, “Higher Ground,” as an impetus to our own study. Its refrain encapsulates the desire of many Christians.

*Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on Heaven’s tableland,
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

Many Christians live on a “plateau,” enjoying the Christian life around them, but inwardly they yearn for something more, something deeper and more lasting. They long to make a difference in the lives of their friends, lost or unlost. They want to live in victory over sin. They want more fruitfulness from their witness. They desire a deeper walk with God and to live by faith, living in a way that pleases God.

No longer satisfied with the accustomed “plateau,” they pray for God to grant them a “tableland” or “higher ground.” But this high ground is not one from which simply to minister. It is to know God in His entirety. We desire the same as Paul: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).

This may be the most lasting message we can take from this song. We want to know God more fully and serve as more effective Christians. We are encouraged to plant our feet on higher ground and be eternally more abundant as Christians. JDM

Tuesday, June 23

Upward Way

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

The hymn “Higher Ground” acknowledges the difficulties of the Christian life. But we press on, ever striving for the goal. A Christian must be habitually “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13). And so it is in the hymn.

*I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day;
Still praying as I’m onward bound,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

All faithful warriors must remember that they are fighting for the King. “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4). Many successful soldiers in the Lord’s army may be gaining new victories each day, although in the bigger picture these may go unrecognized by others and sometimes even by the individual soldier. But these efforts and soldiers will be commended by the One for whom we are fighting.

Our endeavors must always be bathed in prayer as we seek to gain His favor. Our supplication must be “Lord, grant me victory over any sin which besets me. Provide me favor today as I press on in your service. Give me opportunity to teach your Word to those in need. Give me fruit which lasts for eternity.” An earnest plea that touches God’s heart has great power, and we can look forward to seeing it work mightily. As the hymn teaches, we can expect Him to plant our feet on higher ground. JDM

Sin and the Christian God

“But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 6:11-12)

A Christian has no desire for his past life of sin. As we see in our text, we should “flee these things” and “lay hold on eternal life,” putting off whatever is old and instead putting on what is new. The second verse of our study hymn “Higher Ground” expresses this as well.

*My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where those abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.*

One of the most precious promises of Christianity can be found in 2 Corinthians 5:17, where we see that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” We are told that we can put our old habits of sin behind us and live a new life in victory over sin and death. No longer can sin reign over us—we can live in victory. Even doubts and fears can be dismissed from our presence. Our God has promised throughout His Scriptures: “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).

There is no need to be anywhere else. My prayer and my aim are to walk where He leads and be where He wants me to be. Only while there can we be assured of higher ground with Him. JDM

Thursday, June 25

Satan's Wiles

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” (Ephesians 6:16)

Our goals as victorious warriors or even survivors in the battle at hand include neutralizing the enemy's tactics as well as defeating him. The Christian wants to live above the fray, being successful in his efforts to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,” as we saw in our text. The third verse of the hymn “Higher Ground” expresses this desire well.

*I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.*

The passage surrounding our text captures the warrior's spirit well. The fighter is to don with care his entire armor (Ephesians 6:13) and protect his “loins girt about with truth” and wearing the “breastplate of righteousness.” He must be protected from head to toe, “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (v. 14-15) and standing with the helmet of salvation on his head. The text gives further instructions, perhaps more important than all the others, for it instructs “above all, taking the shield of faith.” Our faith, our belief in God, and the knowledge of the Word of God provide the necessary and winning power for the battle. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

The final item mentioned in this important passage is the striving together of the saints for the common goal, praying together and beseeching God for His blessings. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18) makes victory more certain in both the short run and the long. What bliss to catch the joyful sound of faithful saints on higher ground. JDM

Till Heaven I've Found

“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1:3)

As Christians we desire to be with our Lord and see His glory forever. The writer of Hebrews expressed our passion for Him in the text for today. He goes on to tell how “they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:16). Our ultimate goal is to reach glory and see our Savior face to face. The final verse of “Higher Ground” agrees.

*I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till heav'n I've found,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

We must have our expectation fixated on Him and our eternal home. We must pray for His return to take us there and pray that we can influence many others to join us too. Now we face persecution, trials, and troubles, but these are so temporary. Indeed, we are promised that we “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). Only when we reach that “utmost height” and finally perceive that “glory bright” will we fully understand Him, while our thankfulness continues for eons.

Studying this grand Christian hymn reminds us of the wondrous Christian opportunities before us and the majesty of heaven's higher ground that awaits us. We have the privilege of living above the sin so prevalent around us and confronting even our enemy with victory. And our ultimate goal is our Savior in heaven. Dear friend, we have a great journey ahead and great joy at the end. JDM

Saturday, June 27

The Two Ways

“For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” (Psalm 1:6)

This verse outlines the inescapable truth that there are only two roads and two destinations to which they lead in eternity. The word “way” (Hebrew *derek*) means “road.” There is only one way leading to heaven—the way of the righteous; and one way leading to hell—the way of the ungodly.

This is a very common word in Scripture, but it is significant that its first occurrence is in Genesis 3:24, referring to “the way of the tree of life.” Once expelled from the garden of Eden because of their rebellion, Adam and Eve no longer could travel that “way” of life and began to die.

The equivalent Greek word in the New Testament is *hodos*, also meaning “road,” and it too occurs quite frequently. Its literal meaning—that of an actual roadway—lends itself very easily to the figure of a style of life whose practice leads inevitably to a certain destiny. Since there are only two basic ways of looking at life—the God-centered viewpoint and the man-centered viewpoint—there are only two ways of life, the way of the godly and the way of the ungodly. The one leads to life, the other to death. There is no other way.

The Lord Jesus taught: “Enter ye in at the strait [i.e., ‘narrow’] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). But what is the way of the righteous that leads to life? “I am the way,” said the Lord Jesus: “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21). HMM

The Christian's Cleansing

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

This familiar promise is often quoted as a sort of pat formula for dealing with sin in a believer's life. Simply identify and acknowledge the sin, and all is forgiven.

This is gloriously true, so far as it goes, but the last part of the verse is also vitally important. The Lord wants His people to be cleansed from all unrighteousness. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, . . . the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

In these and other verses, the verb translated "cleanse" is the Greek *katharizo*, from which we get such English words as "cathartic." It is a strong word, sometimes translated as "purify" and even "purge." The sin not only is to be confessed, it must be purged!

The Lord Jesus Christ "by himself purged our sins" (Hebrews 1:3) so that God can be perfectly "faithful and just to forgive us our sins" on the basis of His cleansing blood and sanctifying Word. But this is far more than an academic formula, for this cleansing, purifying, and purging must become a real experience in one's life, and the Lord will do whatever is necessary to make it so. He "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify [same word as 'cleanse'] unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14).

We must learn to "walk in the light" and to be "zealous of good works," as He "purgeth us from all unrighteousness" when we "confess our sins." It is necessary that we be constrained to become more "like him," for "when he shall appear, . . . we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). Thus, His forgiveness of our sins is inevitably accompanied by a purging of our lives. HMM

Monday, June 29

Signs of the Times

“When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Matthew 16:2-3)

This sharp rebuke by the Lord Jesus was well deserved, for His critics were challenging Him to prove His right to be heard by performing a miracle. But they had already been confronted with a tremendous body of evidence, both in their Scriptures and in the very life and teachings of Jesus (as well as in the miracles already wrought by Him) that He was their Messiah. They paid great attention to weather forecasting and other mundane matters while ignoring or rejecting the evidence that God Himself, in Christ, was in their midst.

Today we are more occupied with daily weather even than they were, with all sorts of forecasting devices in operation. There is also a growing army of doomsday forecasters, loudly concerned about overpopulation, pollution, and a host of other foreboding secular “signs of the times.”

Yet they ignore the overwhelming evidences, both in science and Scripture, that our great Creator/Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is still in control and is coming again soon to fulfill His great purposes in creation and redemption. A mere listing of the many real signs of God’s times would take many pages. One such sign, of course, is this very proliferation of science and technology. At “the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4). Another is the great following achieved by these false teachers, as multitudes “turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:4). “Hypocrites,” Jesus said, are concerned with secular trends, but spiritual discerners can recognize the true signs. HMM

Profit and Loss

“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26)

In these materialistic days, many people have become abnormally occupied with investments and returns, capital gains and losses, balance sheets and cash flows. This is nothing new, of course. The prevalence of covetousness is so universal, in one form or another, that God had to place a prohibition on it in the Ten Commandments.

The Lord Jesus made a heart-searching comparison one day when He posed a surprising question relative to divine book-keeping. Not even the riches of all the world could purchase one human soul, yet people often seem willing to sacrifice their souls in pursuit of riches. Is such an exchange really a sound investment? Merely to ask the question is to answer it.

Earning wealth is good if it is acquired honorably and by the will of God, but coveting wealth and hoarding wealth are foolish sins. Here is another of many divine profit-and-loss statements: “There is [he] that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is [he] that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Proverbs 13:7). The true measure of profit and loss is the balance sheet kept in heaven. One must first glean an account there, however, and this means coming to God empty-handed, on the basis of Christ’s free gift of His own riches. “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). He died for us, that we might live through Him.

Then, once our heavenly account is established, here is real investment counseling: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). HMM

Wednesday, July 1

Light for Every Man

“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John 1:9)

The Bible clearly teaches that faith in the person and saving work of Jesus Christ is essential for salvation. Jesus Himself said: “I am the way...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

This means that there is no salvation whatsoever in Islam or Buddhism, and certainly not in evolutionary humanism—or anything other than faith in Christ!

But what about the millions over the ages who have lived and died without ever hearing about Christ? Paul answers: “But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Romans 10:18). That is, they *have* heard! Our text reminds us that Jesus Christ is the true Light that has been sent to every *man* in the world. Paul was referring to the familiar 19th Psalm, which reminds us that God’s glory is declared by the heavens themselves.

Paul also stressed that even God’s “eternal power and Godhead” are “clearly seen” “from the creation of the world,” so that those who don’t see are “without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Thus, as Peter said, “in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:35). Although Christ has provided at least some light for “every man,” the tragedy is that “men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19). But for those like Cornelius (to whom Peter was sent with the gospel—Acts 10) who act on whatever light they have (in nature or conscience or any possible remnants of primeval truth in their native religion), God will send more light, for “he that doeth truth cometh to the light” (John 3:21). HMM

Thursday, July 2

Songs in the Night

“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.” (Psalm 42:7-8)

There are times in the life of a believer when he seems about to sink under great avalanches of trouble and sorrow. But then “I call to remembrance my song in the night” (Psalm 77:6), and God answers once again. In the book of Psalms, the theme of conflict and suffering is prominent, but always there is also the note of hope and ultimate triumph.

The very first psalm, for example, notes the conflict of the righteous with the ungodly but promises that “the way of the ungodly shall perish” (v. 6). The second psalm foretells the final rebellion of the heathen against God and His anointed but assures us that God will “vex them in his sore displeasure” (vv. 2, 5). In Psalm 3, the believer says: “Many are they that rise up against me.” But then he remembers that “salvation belongeth unto the LORD” (vv. 1, 8). He cries in Psalm 4: “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer” (v. 1).

In Psalm 5, immediately after the first imprecation in the psalms (“cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions”) occurs the first specific mention of singing in the book of Psalms: “Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout [literally ‘sing’] for joy, because thou defendest them” (vv. 10-11).

The Lord Jesus and His disciples sang a psalm even as they went out into the night of His betrayal and condemnation (Mark 14:26). This is His gracious promise: “Ye shall have a song, as in the night.... And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard” (Isaiah 30:29-30). HMM

Friday, July 3

The Powers of God

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)

In these days of rampant humanism, blatant materialism, and effete religionism, the very concept of an all-powerful God who created, controls, and judges all things seems anachronistic, but God is still *there* and is still the Almighty.

Three Greek words are translated “power” in Scripture—*exousia* (“authority”), *dunamis* (“ability”), and *kratos* (“strength”). Each is attributed in unlimited extent to God the Creator as incarnate in Christ the Redeemer. “All power [‘authority’] is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). “For thine is the kingdom, and the power [‘ability’], and the glory, for ever” (Matthew 6:13). “That ye may know . . . the exceeding greatness of his power [‘ability’] to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power [‘strength’], which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power [‘authority’], and might, and dominion” (Ephesians 1:18-21).

He is the “Almighty God” of Abraham (Genesis 17:1), “the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28). “Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Psalm 115:3).

God can do whatever He pleases, except anything contrary to His nature. He “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), for He is “the truth” (John 14:6). His inspired Word is inerrant—“the scripture of truth” (Daniel 10:21). We can be certain that He did not “create” the world by evolution, for that would be contradicted both by His infallible Word and by His omnipotence. Being all-powerful, God would surely not create by such a cruel, inefficient process as evolution. HMM

Saturday, July 4

The Law of Liberty

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” (James 2:12)

On Independence Day, Americans should give thanks to the Author of liberty that we have been privileged to live in this “sweet land of liberty,” where we can worship God freely in accord with His Word. Liberty is not license, however, and the essence of the American system is liberty under law. Fundamentally, that law is “the law of nature and of nature’s God”—the natural laws of God’s world and the revealed laws of God’s Word. Within that framework we do have liberty—but not liberty to defy either the physical law of gravity or the spiritual “law of liberty.” The latter is formulated in Scripture and has been applied over the centuries, in the English common law and later in our system of constitutional law, both of which are based on Scripture.

Some today, seeking license rather than liberty, might recoil at the very idea of “the law of liberty,” calling it an oxymoron, or contradiction in terms. But Jesus said that only “the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), and “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15), not freedom!

No one can be saved by the law, but those who are saved—by grace through faith in Christ—will love God’s law, for it is “holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12). We should say with the psalmist: “So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts” (Psalm 119:44-45).

There is, indeed, a law of liberty, and whoever will walk in real liberty will find it only in God’s law of life, through His revealed Word. For “whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25). HMM

Sunday, July 5

Meditation

“Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.” (Psalm 119:27)

The remarkable 119th Psalm, with its 22 eight-verse stanzas, is the unique “song of the word,” containing 176 testimonies or prayers concerning God’s Word—one for each verse. Eight times the word “meditate” or “meditation” is used, indicating the importance of this practice in relation to the Scriptures. In our text, this word is translated “talk,” but its basic thrust is to exhort us to meditate on the wonderful works of God, once we understand the way of His precepts.

The other seven references to meditation in this psalm are as follows: “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways” (v. 15). “Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes” (v. 23). “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes” (v. 48). “Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts” (v. 78). “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (v. 97). “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation” (v. 99). “Mine eyes prevent [i.e., anticipate] the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word” (v. 148).

There is, of course, a counterfeit form of meditation (e.g., so-called transcendental meditation and other forms of mysticism), not to mention useless daydreaming. These forms of meditation involve clearing one’s mind of all subjects and allowing the mind to wander. In contrast, true meditation involves pondering with awe and thankfulness God’s wonderful Word, His ways, and His works—in connection with prayer and the study of the Holy Scriptures. As an exercise of the mind as well as of the spirit, it is of great blessing and most pleasing to God. HMM

O My Soul

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.” (Psalm 42:5)

This expression (“O my soul”) is not used here by the psalmist as a trite exclamation but as a plea of heart-searching introspection, concerned over the dark depression that was about to settle over him because of the oppressions of his enemies (Psalm 43:2). The question in our text is asked three times by him in these two short psalms (Psalm 42:5,11; 43:5), and each time he answers himself: “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him.”

Yet, God continued to withhold His answer. His enemies were taunting him about it (Psalm 42:3, 10), and the psalmist, in spite of himself, found himself crying out “Why?” no less than 10 times. Nevertheless, his faith in God never failed, and it thus becomes a great testimony to us today for he asked his “why?” questions in submission to God’s will. When we are tempted to “go...mourning because of the oppression of the enemy” (42:9; 43:2) and still God seems to have “forgotten,” then is the very time we must continue to affirm: “I shall yet praise him!” He is “the God of my life,” and “in the night his song shall be with me” (42:8).

It may not be God’s will to set us free from the “noise of thy waterspouts” (42:7) or “the deceitful and unjust man” (43:1), but His light and truth will still lead, and we can yet praise Him, despite the circumstances.

In our text, the psalmist praises God for “the help of his countenance.” In the verses that echo this verse (42:11; 43:5), his testimony is slightly—yet significantly—changed. “I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance.”

Therefore, even in a dark night of “O my soul,” we can see Him by faith, with countenances full of joy. HMM

Tuesday, July 7

The Truth

“And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Timothy 4:4)

This is the last of 11 occurrences of “the truth” in Paul’s two letters to Timothy. He was not writing about the importance of being truthful in general but about a specific body of factual information concerning Jesus Christ and its vital importance. Thus, “the truth” was a very important theme in both of Paul’s letters to this young pastor—and, by implication, to all God-called pastors.

Paul first speaks of “the knowledge of the truth” required for salvation (1 Timothy 2:4), then of his own teaching as “the truth in Christ” (1 Timothy 2:7), then of “the church of the living God” as “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), and of Christians as those who “believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:3). He stresses the importance of studying the Bible as “the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), and also that true repentance requires “the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25).

Paul also warns of false and covetous teachers who are “destitute of the truth” (1 Timothy 6:5) and who therefore “concerning the truth have erred” (2 Timothy 2:18). There will even be false prophets who “resist the truth” and are “reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Timothy 3:8).

As a result of the teachings of these false teachers, there will be many so-called seekers of truth who are “ever learning” yet who seem “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). The reason they never find the truth is because they “turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:4).

The fact is that Jesus said: “I am...the truth” and also that “thy word is truth” (John 14:6; 17:17). For any who would say with Pilate “What is truth?” (John 18:38), there is the definitive answer! HMM

Wednesday, July 8

The Light of the Word

*“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”
(Psalm 119:105)*

As the sun provides physical light for the world, so Jesus Christ is spiritually “the light of the world” (John 8:12). However, we clearly can see His light only through the light holder, the lamp, as it were, of His written Word. The Word, therefore, is a lamp and, since it contains and reveals the light, is also a light in its own right. Without the Holy Scriptures, this world would lie in the deepest darkness, but “the entrance of thy words giveth light” (Psalm 119:130).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the living Word, and “without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:3-5). Although He “was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9), when He Himself came into the world, those who were made by Him refused to receive Him. “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Just so, although the written Word has come into the world, the world does not receive it, either. The lamp and the light of the written Word have been in the world (in complete and final form) for 1,900 years, but people still reject and ridicule it, and the world still lies in darkness. Nevertheless, for those who receive it, there is wonderful light. “Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light” (John 12:35-36).

God’s Word always brings light. His first spoken Word was “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), and wherever He speaks, God sees the light, and it is good! HMM

Thursday, July 9

The Lord and King Cyrus

“That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.” (Isaiah 44:28)

This is a remarkable prophecy, one of the main stumbling blocks of liberals who use it as an excuse for their completely wrong notion of a “second Isaiah.” Long before Jerusalem was invaded and its temple destroyed by the armies of Babylon, Isaiah was already prophesying its rebuilding!

Furthermore, the great Persian emperor Cyrus (whose nation would eventually conquer Babylon) was here named by God about 150 years before he was born and 175 years before he would fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy by giving Ezra authority to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-2).

Since liberal scholars do not want to believe in miracles and fulfilled prophecy, they have decided that this prophecy could not have been written by the original Isaiah but by some later writer living after Cyrus. The truth is, however, that God controls the future and can reveal it if He chooses, using this very fact as proof that He will keep His other promises. “Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus...I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou has not known me” (Isaiah 45:1, 4).

God had also named King Josiah before he was born (1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 23:15-16), with the specific prophecy concerning him waiting to be fulfilled for over 300 years after it was first spoken.

It may take a long time, but God will surely do all He has said. “I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isaiah 46:9-10). HMM

Exceeding Greatness

“And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.” (Ephesians 1:19)

There are a number of scriptural superlatives that convey something of the tremendous magnitude of our great salvation. These are marked by the adjective “exceeding,” which in the Greek implies essentially boundless, surpassing dimensions of the attributes it describes.

First of all, as our text implies, His *power* available to us is one of exceeding greatness. Its magnitude is measured by the power required to bring Christ back from death and Hades.

Consider also the measure of His *grace*, “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). His grace has saved us when we were dead in sins, but this is only a small token. In the ages to come, we will experience His grace as one of exceeding riches.

Then there is the wonderful *peace* of God. “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). In this verse, the word “passeth” is the same word. Paul is saying that God’s peace is one exceeding understanding.

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

Thus, the infinite blessings and resources of our salvation in Christ are described as providing the power of surpassing greatness, the grace of surpassing richness, the peace which surpasses all understanding, and the eternal glory of surpassing abundance! All of this is freely available “to us-ward who believe.” HMM

Saturday, July 11

The Shame of Entropy

“I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Corinthians 6:5)

The word for “shame” in this verse is the Greek *entropē*, meaning “turning inward” or “inversion.” It is used only one other time, in 1 Corinthians 15:34: “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” Evidently this special variety of shame is associated with taking controversies between Christian brethren to ungodly judges and also with failing to witness to the non-Christian community. Instead of bringing the true wisdom of God to the ungodly, such “entropic Christians” were turning to worldly wisdom to resolve their own spiritual problems. This inverted behavior was nothing less than spiritual confusion!

The modern scientific term “entropy” is essentially this same Greek word. In science, entropy is a measure of disorder in any given system. The universal law of increasing entropy states that every system tends to disintegrate into disorder, or confusion, if left to itself. This tendency can only be reversed if ordering energy is applied to it effectively from a source outside the system.

This universal scientific law has a striking parallel in the spiritual realm. A person turning inward to draw on his own bank of power, or seeking power from an ineffective outside source, will inevitably deteriorate eventually into utter spiritual confusion and death. But when Christ enters the life, that person becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Scriptures, “his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). The law of spiritual entropy is transformed into the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). HMM

Sunday, July 12

The Rain and the Word

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

In these familiar verses, there is a beautiful anticipation and spiritual application of the so-called “hydrologic cycle” of the science of hydrogeology. The rain and snow fall from the heavens and eventually return there (via the marvelous process of river and groundwater runoff to the oceans), then later evaporation by solar radiation and translation inland high in the sky by the world’s great wind circuits, finally to fall again as rain and snow on the thirsty land, beginning the cycle once more.

But they do not return until they first have accomplished their work of watering the earth, providing and renewing the world’s water and food supplies to maintain its life.

Analogously, God’s Word goes forth from heaven via His revealed Scriptures and their distribution and proclamation by His disciples. It does not return void, for it accomplishes God’s spiritual work on Earth. But it does return, for it is “for ever...settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

The fruitful spreading of God’s Word is presented in many other Scriptures. For example: “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days....In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Ecclesiastes 11:1, 6).

Thus, as we sow and water the seed—which is the Word of God—we have God’s divine promise that it will accomplish that which He pleases. HMM

Monday, July 13

Resurrection in the Old Testament

“Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”
(Isaiah 26:19)

Some have argued that the doctrine of a bodily resurrection was unknown to the Israelites of the Old Testament. In fact, this denial was a cardinal doctrine of the sect of the Sadducees at the time of Christ (Matthew 22:23).

Our text, however, makes it clear that this promise has always been known to the people of God. Long before Isaiah's time, Job had said: “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And...in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26). After the time of Isaiah, the promise was still known. “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Such promises were not referring to some vague “immortality of the soul,” as taught in pagan religions, but to resurrection of the body!

First, however, the Creator must become man, die for the sins of the world, and defeat death by His own bodily resurrection. In our text, in fact, Christ is saying that Old Testament believers would be raised “together with my dead body.” This was literally fulfilled when “the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matthew 27:52-53). Then, when Jesus first ascended to heaven (John 20:17), He led those who had been in “captivity” in the grave with Him into heaven (Ephesians 4:8). All who have trusted Christ in the Christian era will likewise be raised from the dead when He comes again. He has defeated death and has promised, “because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19). HMM

Tuesday, July 14

The Good Seed

*“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.”
(Luke 8:11)*

The Word of God is pictured by many beautiful symbols in the Scriptures, and perhaps one of the most meaningful is that of the seed sown in the field of the world by the great sower, the Lord Jesus Christ. The first reference to seed sowing in the Bible is in the story of Isaac, who “sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him” (Genesis 26:12).

Now Isaac himself was the “seed” of God’s promise to Abraham, and he was a precursive fulfillment of the ultimate promised “seed, which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). Isaac’s sowing of literal seed in the land of the Philistines is thus a type of Christ’s sowing of spiritual seed throughout the world. As Isaac’s sowing brought forth a hundredfold, so the beautiful parable of the sower indicates that at least some of the seed “fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold” (Luke 8:8).

Although not all seed will come to fruition, it must be sown throughout the world. Some of the seed will bear fruit, for God has said “that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be...it shall not return unto me void” (Isaiah 55:10-11). “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).

The first of Christ’s parables is this parable of the sower. The second, complementing the first, indicates that the seed is not only God’s Word but also God’s children—those regenerated through the Word. “He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:37-38). Thus, we also become sowers of the Word, witnessing to the world and bearing good fruit in His name. HMM

Wednesday, July 15

Learning by Example

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” (2 Timothy 3:14)

When Paul wrote these words to Timothy, they were in the midst of his foreboding prophecy of coming apostasy and persecution. Furthermore, he knew that he himself would soon be executed and that these might well be his final teachings to his young disciple and to others through him. It is remarkable that in such a setting the Spirit of God impelled him to use the example of his own life as the best and most fitting climax to his great ministry. “Just keep on believing and doing what I have been teaching you—that which you have seen put into practice in your own life.” These teachings and practices had just been recounted in verses 10-11, and what a remarkable summary they provide of a genuine Christian life!

Doctrine—my teachings, sound and true to God’s Word

Manner of life—my Christ-like behavior and habits

Purpose—my sole aim, to honor God and do His will

Faith—my faithfulness to His Word and its demands

Longsuffering—my patient forbearance

Charity—my showing true Christian love

Patience—my cheerful endurance in hard times

Persecutions—the unjust opposition heaped upon me

Afflictions—sufferings and tortures that I endured

The apostle Paul had maintained this strong and consistent Christian testimony for over 30 years following his conversion and could, in all good conscience and true humility, cite his own example as a true teaching aid for others to study and follow.

May Paul’s example be ours, and may our lives likewise become true examples of Christianity for any who are watching us today. HMM

Committed to Thy Trust

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.” (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

Paul exhorted his disciple, Timothy, and by implication exhorts us, to “keep” (literally to guard or preserve) that which was placed in his trust. The context implies that the entire teaching of Paul is in mind, as well as Timothy’s position of ministry.

Not only was he to preserve truth, he actively was to “avoid” error. Systems of thought were available that masqueraded as “science” (literally “knowledge”). These systems were not merely neutral but were in opposition to the truth.

There can be no doubt that godless humanism (particularly as it finds its false scientific justification in evolution and uniformitarianism) has been responsible for the loss of faith in many professing Christians. Much of what is called “science” in universities today could better be described as “profane and vain babblings.”

But today’s students are not alone in their error. Back in the 1800s, when uniformitarianism, and later evolution, were first being championed by only a small minority of scientists, theologians led the way to their broad acceptance. Rushing to embrace Charles Lyell’s principle of uniformity and the concept of an old earth while still holding on to a charade of biblical authority, theologians proposed the tranquil flood and local flood concepts. Likewise, theologians proposed theistic evolution, the day age, and gap theories to accommodate evolution, and their theological grandchildren enjoy the majority voice at most evangelical seminaries today.

It is time that Christian laity as well as those standing in our pulpits today regain “that which is committed to [their] trust” and avoid “science falsely so called.” JDM

Friday, July 17

For Our Transgressions

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

The 53rd chapter of Isaiah (actually, the chapter should begin at Isaiah 52:13) contains the clearest and fullest exposition of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ for our sins to be found in all the Bible. Our text verse is the central verse of this chapter, which, in turn, is the central chapter of Isaiah’s second division, chapters 40–66.

Although the chapter and verse divisions of the Bible were not part of the original inspired text, it almost seems that some of them (notably here in Isaiah) were somehow providentially guided. Part 1 of Isaiah contains 39 chapters and part 2 has 27 chapters, just as the Old and New Testaments have 39 and 27 books, respectively. Likewise, the major themes of the two Testaments—law and judgment in the Old, grace and salvation in the New—respectively dominate the two divisions of Isaiah. Many other correlations can be discerned—for example, the second division begins with the prophecy of John the Baptist and ends with the prophecy of the new heavens and the new earth, just as the New Testament does.

Be that as it may, this central verse of the central chapter of Isaiah’s salvation division surely displays the very heart of the gospel. Christ was “wounded” (literally “thrust through,” as with great spikes) and “bruised” (literally “crushed to death”) for our sins.

On the other hand, we receive “peace” with God because He was chastised (i.e., “disciplined”) in our place, and we are forever “healed” of our lethal sin-sickness because He received the “stripes” (i.e., great welts caused by severe blows) that should have been ours. What wondrous love is this! HMM

The Pure Word

“Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.” (Proverbs 30:5)

When the inspired writer of Proverbs testified here that God’s Word was “pure,” he did not use the usual word for, say, moral purity or metallic purity. Instead, he asserted in effect that every word of God had been refined and purified, as it were in a spiritual furnace, so that any and all contaminants had been purged out, leaving only the pure element.

The same truth is found in the great psalm of the Scriptures (Psalm 119). “Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it” (Psalm 119:140). David used the same word in another psalm, where it is translated “tried” in the sense of “tested for purity.” “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him” (Psalm 18:30). The word for “buckler” in this verse is the same as for “shield” in our text. Thus, God equips with a perfect shield against the weapons of any foe, because “His way is perfect” and “every word” in Scripture has been made “pure” before the Spirit of God approved its use by the human writer.

This surely tells us that the human writer of Scripture (that is, Moses or David or John or whomever), with all his human proneness to mistakes or other inadequacies, was so controlled by the Holy Spirit that whatever he actually wrote had been purged of any such deficiencies. Thus, his final written text had been made perfectly “pure,” free from any defects. This control applies to “every word” so that we can legitimately refer to the Scriptures as verbally inspired and inerrant throughout.

As the apostle Paul stressed, our spiritual armor in the battle against evil is “the shield of faith” and “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:16-17). HMM

Sunday, July 19

The Prince of Glory

“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1:3)

One of the most precious hymns of the Christian faith is “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” written by Isaac Watts. Let us use its rich rehearsal of truth in poetry to guide our Bible study these next four days.

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

The great King of all creation laid aside aspects of His immortal attributes and became a mortal man so He could die for us. Simultaneously man and God, He endured death for condemned sinners, then He re-entered His lifeless body. The hymn writer called Him the “Prince of glory,” a fitting affirmation on the eternal Son of the Father.

Having once again retaken His created life, the Creator offered us eternal life—a free gift to undeserving sinners. Having paid the sufficient price for all our sin, thereby removing all penalties levied against sinful man, He offered us eternal life also. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14).

Nothing we do in this life gains us eternity; works are worthless. “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8). Working for rewards can avail nothing, but rather we look to the cross of our wondrous Christ. JDM

Monday, July 20

Not I, but Christ

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

The second verse of “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” continues by rightly identifying the focus of a believer’s affections. This song does not direct our affection to objects like the cross or the blood and so imply improper worship, but it clearly specifies the deity and work of Christ as paramount to us. We worship Him for who He is and what He has done and is doing on our behalf. His death makes all the difference to us.

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

We know that “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). What happened there? “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Romans 5:10).

Today we no longer have an obligation to render animal sacrifices to God for our sin, but we do need to offer something better than even our best. Scripture asks us to “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1). We do not literally sacrifice ourselves to His blood, but we cherish and recognize that the shedding of His blood on the cross makes it all possible. JDM

Tuesday, July 21

His Head, His Hands, His Feet

“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side....And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My LORD and my God.” (John 20:27-28)

Perhaps no other means of execution ever inflicted more physical pain than Roman crucifixion. Today as we ponder verse three of the precious hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” we reflect on the facts that when Christ was crucified, a cruel crown of thorns was mashed down upon His head and His body was held suspended in place by painful Roman spikes nailed through His hands and feet. He knew what awaited Him, for a description of the dying process had been written long beforehand (Psalm 22). Yet, He endured it all out of love for us.

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

We get some perspective of His love from these verses: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

He has done it all for us. We cannot earn salvation, but we have an obligation to conform our lives to His example, even His death. Scripture informs us that we can “know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10). His death on the cross and His resurrection pave the way for us to follow. JDM

Wednesday, July 22

Love So Amazing, So Divine

“In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.” (Colossians 1:22)

The past three days we have studied the verses of the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” We have seen insights into the sufferings of Christ on the cross for our behalf, the love that led Him there, and its bountiful gift to believers. We are now prepared to consider our response.

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

The author, Isaac Watts, begins verse four with a mention of creation. If we were to own it, it would not suffice as a suitable gift, for He is the Creator of all (Colossians 1:16-17), including the vastness of space, the intricacies of life and Earth systems, the mighty spiritual angels, and even the creation of His image in man. “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” (1 Corinthians 8:6). He is Lord of all! He knows us better than we know ourselves, and yet He loves us so.

The most amazing line of the hymn is the final couplet. A fitting response to His love would be a complete offering of one’s soul, life, and all. He is our great Creator and the offended Judge. He gave up aspects of His eternal essence in order to take up our likeness and die for us. He is our everlasting King. It all focuses in on the cross—the wondrous cross!

“My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27). “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever” (1 Timothy 1:17). JDM

Thursday, July 23

Jesus Christ Our Creator

“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” (Colossians 1:16)

Before one can really know Jesus Christ as Savior or Lord, he must acknowledge Him as offended and rejected Creator, because He was our Creator first of all. This is such an important doctrine of the New Testament that it is remarkable how rarely it is emphasized in modern evangelicalism.

Creation by Jesus Christ is the doctrine with which John begins his great gospel of salvation: “In the beginning was the Word,...All things were made by him;...and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:1, 3, 10). It is the foundational message of the book of Hebrews: “God ...hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The apostle Paul said that he had been called specifically to preach “the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:8-9). When a person becomes a believer in Christ, receiving His very life by the new birth, he is said to be “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:10).

In the final book of the Bible, Jesus Christ is called “the beginning of the creation of God” (Revelation 3:14). But of all the biblical passages identifying Jesus Christ as Creator, the most definitive of all is our text for today. Everything in heaven and Earth was created by Him and for Him! “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Romans 11:36). HMM

The Ransom Price

*“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”
(Matthew 20:28)*

The thought that the death of Jesus and His shed blood were somehow the ransom price paid to redeem lost sinners from an eternal prison in hell has been a stumbling block to many of those very sinners. Yet, that is the teaching of Scripture, whether it appeals to their reasonings or not. “Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). In the Old Testament economy, ransoms were paid for various reasons, such as freeing slaves. The last use of “ransom” in the Old Testament, however, seems to foreshadow the New Testament concept. “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death” (Hosea 13:14).

But to whom was the ransom of Christ to be paid? Not to the devil, of course, or to any human king. It can only have been paid to God Himself, for He had set “the wages of sin” to be “death” (Romans 6:23). For a time, these wages had been paid in part “by the blood of goats and calves” offered on the altar as a temporary covering for sins. But that was only until the true ransom could be paid. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who... offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).

Such a sacrifice was not foolishness as the scoffer claims, but “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Praise God—the ransom has been paid and we have been redeemed!
HMM

Saturday, July 25

With the Rich in His Death

“And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:9)

It is generally recognized that the amazing 53rd chapter of Isaiah, written over 500 years earlier, is the most explicit and complete exposition of the substitutionary suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the Bible, including even the New Testament accounts. And this prophecy that His death and burial would be with both the “wicked, and with the rich” is surely one of the most remarkable. How could such a prediction possibly come to pass?

Yet, it did! Unjustly condemned, not for any violent or deceitful acts, but only for telling the truth, Jesus was crucified between two wicked criminals, yet He was buried in a garden tomb lovingly built by a rich member of the council that had condemned Him to death.

Furthermore, that elaborate tomb had almost certainly been personally designed and built ahead of time by Joseph in specific anticipation of using it to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy. That wealthy owner of the tomb lived in Arimathea and would never have built a tomb for himself or his family near Calvary, the place of crucifixion. But he and a friend on the council (Nicodemus) had somehow come to believe in Jesus and His gospel and decided they were the ones that should render this service.

Perhaps, as they looked up at the body of the Lord on the cross just before removing it for burial, they remembered His words to Nicodemus three years earlier, when He had said: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). They had indeed believed, no doubt suffering severe loss, but they had done what they could for Christ. HMM

Places He Has Been

“And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.” (John 18:2)

In the 18th and 19th chapters of John’s gospel, there are four “places” where Jesus had to go to accomplish our salvation. The first was the place as noted in our text: He, “knowing all things that should come upon him” (John 18:4), nevertheless went directly to that place, knowing that Judas would meet Him there.

Then He went to the place of trial: “Pilate...brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called...Gabbatha” (John 19:13). But He did not stay there long; the mockery of a trial was soon over, and Pilate delivered Him to be crucified. “And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull” (John 19:16-17). And in that place called Golgotha, He died for our sins.

He was betrayed in a place called Gethsemane, condemned in a place called Gabbatha, and crucified in a place called Golgotha. But that was not all; He must yet be laid in a tomb. “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus” (John 19:41-42).

And that also was the place from which He arose, and our salvation was secured forever! Now, just before this amazing four-place itinerary of our Lord Jesus, He had promised still another place to which He would be going.

“In my Father’s house are many mansions....I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3).

Because He went to a place called Calvary, we shall soon be with Him forever in a place called heaven! HMM

Monday, July 27

He Shall Judge the World

“Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.” (Psalm 96:13)

Those men and women who reject or ignore the wonderful offer of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ need somehow to realize the eternal consequences of their foolishness. Jesus Christ was not just a religious teacher in Israel 2,000 years ago but is the very God who created them, the Second Person of the triune Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). God the Father “created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9) and therefore “hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22).

And on what basis will He judge us? Our text tells us that “righteousness” and “truth” are the criteria. The problem is that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). However, the Lord Jesus was incarnate truth and righteousness, and God “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ has made eternal salvation available freely to us. There is no other way. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

But how do we know that all this is not just a peculiar doctrine of one particular religion?

Here is how: God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). By defeating death itself, Christ has vindicated His claim to be the Judge of all! HMM

Tuesday, July 28

The Day of Visitation

“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12)

This unique expression, “in the day of visitation,” based on a surprising use of the Greek word *episkope*, occurs one other time in such a way, when Christ wept over Jerusalem and pronounced its coming judgment. “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes...because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:42-44).

Now this word, *episkope*, and its derivatives are usually translated as “bishop,” “office of a bishop,” or “bishopric,” and it seems strange at first that it could also mean “visitation.” However, its basic meaning is “overseer” or “oversight,” and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is really the “Shepherd and Bishop of [our] souls” (1 Peter 2:25), as well as that of nations and, indeed, every aspect of every life.

As a bishop or pastor (“shepherd”) is responsible for the “oversight” of his local church, or flock, so Christ is “that great Shepherd of the sheep,” the true “Bishop of [our] souls,” the overseer of all people in every age. In His great plan of the ages, the Jews, and then the Gentiles, each have been entrusted with a time of “visitation,” or “oversight,” of God’s witness to the world. Sadly, Jerusalem “knewest not the time of [her] visitation” (Luke 19:44) and, as for Judas, the Lord had to say, “his bishoprick let another take” (Acts 1:20).

Now in God’s providence, it is the time of Gentile oversight, and it is eternally important that we who know His salvation today glorify God by our good works, with our “conversation [i.e., lifestyle] honest among the Gentiles” in our own “day of visitation.” HMM

Wednesday, July 29

The Everlasting Covenant

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” (Hebrews 13:20)

This is the only verse in the book of Hebrews that refers specifically to Christ’s resurrection from the dead. It occurs at the climactic conclusion of the book (which had previously referred at least 17 times to the atoning death of Christ) and is associated with God’s everlasting covenant with His people.

The covenant theme is strong in Hebrews. The Greek word *diatheke*, which is also frequently translated “testament,” occurs more in Hebrews than in all the rest of the New Testament (or “New Covenant”) put together. The word basically means a contract, especially one for disposition of an inheritance.

A number of God’s divine covenants are mentioned in Scripture, but the writer of Hebrews is especially concerned with God’s new covenant (or “new testament”). It is surely the most significant of all covenants.

This new covenant is also called “a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22; 8:6). It is best defined in Hebrews 8:10-12, quoting Jeremiah 31:33-34: “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: . . . and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Christ is “the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15).

The inheritance is eternal because the covenant is everlasting. The blood of the covenant is the infinitely precious blood of Christ, whom God has raised from the dead, and now “he ever liveth to make intercession” for all those who “come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:25). HMM

Thursday, July 30

Given to Us Eternal Life

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” (1 John 5:11)

Our text for today contains truths that provide great power and comfort for Christians. Let us reflect on some of them.

The word “record” needs amplification. In noun form, it means “the evidence given,” and in verb form it means “testify,” or “witness.” The apostle John used it nine times in verses 7 through 11. Study of our text and its context shows that the record mentioned is none other than the great truth that Christ Jesus was God’s only Son and that He died as a perfect and fully sufficient sacrifice to provide us life eternal.

In our text, we see that this work of bestowing eternal life is God’s work. It is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). This eternal life is our present possession, for He “hath given” it to us (i.e., in the past). This gift is to individuals—to “us”—not to a nation or even the church, but to those who have believed. Furthermore, this “eternal life” is eternal! It will last for eternity and cannot be taken away. It is inconceivable for an omnipotent God to give “eternal life” temporarily. We are alive in Him, having been born (again) into His family. This is a permanent situation.

The tense shifts to the present in the last phrase of the text. Our “life is in his Son.” We are “in him....This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). Our life finds its vitality in living union with the Son. His death and resurrection made life possible, and now His present life is ours. His Spirit, resident within us, provides this vitality, and since the Spirit of God is eternal, our life is eternal. “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, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (v. 13). JDM

Friday, July 31

The Powerful Hand of God

“Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.” (Isaiah 48:13)

The human hand is an anatomical marvel; nothing remotely comparable exists among the primates or any other animals. It is a marvel of design. But surely the “hand of God”—of which a human’s hand is only a very dim shadow—is infinitely more powerful and skillful.

Note the testimony of Isaiah 45:12: “I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.” God did not have to use intermediate processes or pre-existing materials. Everything was “commanded” into existence, and “I, even my hands,” made all of it, including humans. Creation was *direct*—a direct product of God’s mighty hands.

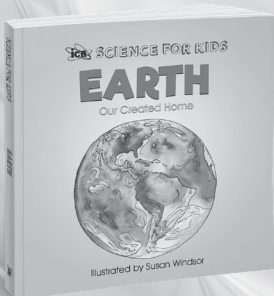
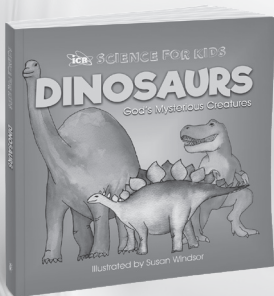
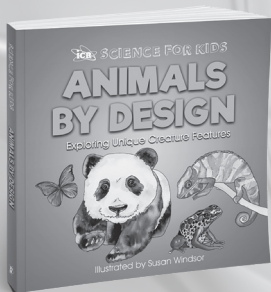
Not only was it direct, it was also *immediate*, as our text above makes emphatically plain. His hand laid the earth’s foundation and spanned the heavens. Then, “when I call unto them,” He says, “*they stand up together!*” Not one by one—first the universe, then the sun, then the earth, and so on. No, “they stand up together.” “He spake, and it was done” (Psalm 33:9). It did not take 16 billion years; it took six days—and the only reason it took that long was so that God’s workweek could serve as a pattern for people (Exodus 20:8-11).

God’s hand is omnipotent, and “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” It is wonderful to know His hand is gentle and loving as well as powerful. His hands will bear eternal scars where they were spiked to the cross, because He loved us and died for us. “My sheep hear my voice,” He says, “and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). The hand that spanned the heavens can hold on to those who trust Him. HMM

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Saturday, August 1

Those Whom God Calls Fools

“Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?” (Deuteronomy 32:6)

This rebuke was by Moses as he warned the people of God just before their entrance into the Promised Land. It contains the first use of the Hebrew *nabal* (translated “fool” or “foolish”) in the Bible. Here it is applied to God’s chosen people after they had been redeemed out of Egyptian slavery by God. This implies that the most foolish of all people are those who have known about God and His great salvation and yet have turned away from His Word.

Paul writes in similar scathing terms of those who had known of God’s great deliverance of their fathers from the evil world before the Flood and yet then abandoned Him for idolatry. “When they knew God,...their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:21-22).

David used the same word about those who decide they can explain things without God, just as many intellectuals in modern America do. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God....Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread: they have not called upon God” (Psalm 53:1, 4).

Even prophets and preachers can become fools if they follow their own wisdom instead of God’s Word. “Thus saith the Lord GOD; woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!” (Ezekiel 13:3).

Jesus rebuked even those He dearly loved because they were surprised and discouraged when He was crucified. “O fools,” He said, because they had been “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). God help us to maintain believing hearts, not foolish hearts, as we serve Him! HMM

Sunday, August 2

Fire in the Bones

“Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9)

When God’s Word really becomes a part of one’s soul, that one can never be the same again. As dejected Jeremiah said in his imprisonment: “The word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily” (Jeremiah 20:8). So, he said: “I will not...speak any more in his name.” But he could not quit! God’s Word was burning in his bones, and he must let it out. “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29).

The psalmist David had a similar testimony. “I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue” (Psalm 39:2-3). When the resurrected Christ “expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself,” the two disciples from Emmaus later testified: “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:27, 32).

Of all the symbols applied in the Scriptures to God’s Word, that of fire is the most awe-inspiring. Fire was not a discovery of some primitive man, as evolutionists imagine, but has always been an instrument of God’s judgment, from the flaming sword in Eden (Genesis 3:24) to the lake of fire in hell (Revelation 21:8). In fact, God Himself is said to be “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

The word of fire in the burning heart cannot be contained but must be proclaimed at any cost. As Paul acknowledged: “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16). HMM

Monday, August 3

Acceptable Sacrifices

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

In the Old Testament theocracy of Israel, it was the responsibility of the Levitical priesthood to be “daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices” in atonement for the sins of the people, and this continued until Jesus Christ “offered one sacrifice for sins for ever” (Hebrews 10:11-12). The old priesthood has now been set aside. Only the sacrifice of Christ and our identification with Him through faith is acceptable for our salvation.

Nevertheless, there is a new priesthood—a spiritual priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices—and it is vital that we who are now His priests offer sacrifices that are acceptable and pleasing to God. The first and most basic sacrifice is set forth in one of the Bible’s key verses: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Three other acceptable sacrifices are outlined in the concluding chapter of Hebrews. “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:15-16).

The continual offering of praise to God, in all circumstances acknowledging His wisdom and goodness, is an acceptable sacrifice. Doing good works—not for our salvation but because of our salvation—is acceptable. So is “communicating” (Greek *koinonia*)—sharing what we have with others. With these sacrifices, God is “well pleased.” It is our high privilege as His holy priesthood to offer up these spiritual sacrifices. HMM

The Sword

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34)

The Christian life is a life of war, and the Christian soldier must be a skilled swordsman if he is to survive and win. In our text, Jesus taught that a peaceful life would not be the Christian’s lot but a life of swordsmanship instead.

The first “sword” mentioned in the Old Testament was not a sword of metal but a “flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24). Likewise, the final sword mentioned in the New Testament is “the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth” (Revelation 19:21). This is the fiery sword with which the coming “man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3) will be defeated, “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (v. 8). “He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” (Isaiah 11:4).

The mighty “word of the LORD” by which “were the heavens made” (Psalm 33:6) is still a flaming sword, turning every way, for “out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword” (Revelation 1:16), as John saw Him in His present glory.

Furthermore, we can wield this same sword by His Spirit, for “the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword... a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

The Christian armor, as outlined in Ephesians 6:13-17, is all defensive armor with the one exception of the prayerful use of “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 17). In this wonderful text, the spoken “word of God” is in view—the sword applied, on either edge, turning every way, probing exactly when and where needed in each encounter of every battle of the Christian warfare. HMM

Wednesday, August 5

The Lasting Noahic Covenant

“And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.” (Genesis 9:11)

When God gave Noah this promise, the world had just been through the devastating cataclysm that flooded the entire globe and destroyed all except those on the Ark. The world was fearful and barren, and there seemed nothing to prevent another such flood from coming on the earth.

Nevertheless, God’s promise—not only to Noah but also to the animals (Genesis 9:9-10)—has been kept for over 4,000 years. God later reminded Job of this promise when He told him that He had “shut up the sea with doors....And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:8, 11). The psalmist also referred to this covenant. When the whole earth had been covered “with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled....Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth” (Psalm 104:6-7, 9).

God has kept His Word, and there has never been another worldwide flood. Sadly, however, many modern compromising Christian theologians and scientists have said that the Flood must have been only a local or regional flood in order (they hope) to please the evolutionists, practically all of whom insist that the earth is 4.6 billion years old and never had any global flood.

If that were true, however, then God has broken His promise. There have been numerous local and regional floods in the world since Noah’s day. But God has kept His promise. The Flood indeed was a unique cataclysm in which “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6), and such a flood has never occurred again. HMM

With Christ

“For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” (Colossians 2:9-10)

The book of Colossians begins with a stirring exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Creator (1:16) and Sustainer of all things (v. 17). He is the Head of the church and preeminent in all things (v. 18). He is fully God (v. 19) and yet Redeemer (v. 20). On the other hand, believers, before they were reconciled, are described as “alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” (v. 21).

It comes as somewhat of a surprise, then, in chapters 2 and 3 to see that we are inexorably linked *with* Christ. Our lives and destinies are His—our identification with Him is total. We are not just reconciled, we are with Him in all things.

Notice, first, that we are “buried *with* him in baptism” (2:12). Furthermore, we are “quickened together [i.e., made alive] *with* him,” no longer “dead in [our] sins” (v. 13), and “risen *with* him” (v. 12). Just as surely as God “raised *him* from the dead,” we are born again; given new life. Obviously, since we are “risen with Christ, [we should] seek those things which are above” (3:1). *Our* priorities should be *His* godly priorities (v. 2), for “Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (v. 1), and we are there.

Next, we are told that our “life is hid *with* Christ in God” (v. 3). To be hidden in Christ is to be totally immersed, covered, our sins concealed, our identity masked within His; indeed, remade into His. God accepts Christ and us, as well, as we are hidden in Him. The next verse amplifies this identification with the term “Christ...our life” (v. 4).

This identification will not be in vain, for when He “shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (v. 4). As our text teaches, we are “complete in him,” for He is fully God, and we are *with* Him in all things. JDM

Friday, August 7

Magnificent Obsession

“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.” (1 Corinthians 9:19)

In his letter to the Ephesians (4:11-16), Paul noted that Christ had given specific gifts to the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Paul himself was all of these, however, and he wanted to win as many people as he could from all walks of life. He therefore sought to be “made all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).

This, indeed, was a magnificent obsession, and every Christian should seek to emulate it as the Lord enables. Paul was not saying, however, that a man should become as a woman to win women to the Lord, or that a woman should become as a man to win men; neither should he become a humanist to win humanists. One should never dilute the doctrines of the faith or Christian standards of conduct in order to win commitments to the church.

Paul was not laying down guidelines for witnessing, either for the church or for individual Christians; he was giving his own personal testimony. Nevertheless, we should seek to be understanding and sympathetic to people of every background. “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32). We should try to “be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Remembering it is “God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7), we should never compromise truth in order to gain converts, but “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) beseech others to “be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). HMM

A Nail in a Sure Place

“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father’s house.” (Isaiah 22:22-23)

This prophecy was originally applied to Eliakim, the keeper of the treasuries in the reign of King Hezekiah. The wearing of the key to the treasuries on his shoulder was symbolic of authority. Isaiah, in fact, had used this same symbol in his great prophecy of the coming Messiah, saying that “unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6).

Eliakim thus became a type of Christ in his capacity to open and shut doors with his special key. The Lord Jesus quoted from this passage in His promise to the church at Philadelphia: “These things saith...he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Revelation 3:7-8). This strong assurance has been a great bulwark to many who were trying to maintain a true witness during times of opposition and suffering.

But Eliakim was also called “a nail in a sure place,” and in this also he becomes a wonderful type of Christ. Eliakim was trustworthy in his office, and so is Christ. The nail in a sure place speaks of stability in time of trouble, as Ezra later said: “Now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God,...to give us a nail in his holy place” (Ezra 9:8). Eventually, of course, Eliakim’s nail had to be removed (Isaiah 22:25), but never that of Christ, for He is “an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Hebrews 6:19) who will never fail. HMM

Sunday, August 9

Humanity's First Job

“God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28)

This verse is often called the dominion mandate and is repeated and amplified in Genesis 9:1-7. The purpose is clear: accept the responsibility to bring into subjection all of earth's systems and creatures, effectively managing its resources, growing and expanding until the earth is filled with the fruits of that labor.

Humanity's First Job Description: When God made the garden “eastward in Eden” (Genesis 2:8) and placed Adam there, Adam was to “dress [serve] and keep [guard]” that special and lavishly designed estate (Genesis 2:8-15) in the unique role as initial occupant but more broadly as God's steward for Earth. There were no instructions on how to serve and guard, only the general “orders” from the Owner to the steward.

Humanity's Implied Responsibility: Since there were no instructions about the functioning systems of Earth, Adam had to first learn about the earth's systems and processes (science), and then organize and utilize the discoveries in productive ways to help others and honor the Creator (technology).

The information about those practical inventions and products of technology had to then be accurately disseminated to everyone through business, education, communication, transportation, etc.

And finally, both the information and inventions had to be received so that the divine evaluation (“very good”) was detailed in works of music, art, and literature, glorifying and praising God for all He had done in creating and making all things.

The ongoing responsibility is still in effect in us “as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). HMM III

Stewardship Conflicts

“Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air; and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” (Psalm 8:6-8)

The commission to rule over Earth was never withdrawn from humanity by the Creator. That dominion mandate implies authorization for the following human enterprises:

- Discovery of truth—science, research, exploration
- Application of truth—agriculture, engineering, medicine, technology, etc.
- Implementation of truth—commerce, transportation, government, etc.
- Interpretation of truth—fine arts, literature, theology
- Transmission of truth—education, communication, homemaking

When that authority was first delegated by the Creator, Earth was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). However, Adam’s failure in his first assignment created an ongoing conflict with humanity’s efforts on every front. Now, the “whole creation groaneth” (Romans 8:22) as the very ground from which all things are made conflicts with the environment (Genesis 3:18). Sin and death are the conditions of existence (Romans 5:12), and ignorance of God’s ideas, apart from God’s revelation, is rampant (1 Corinthians 2:14). Humanity’s drive is to serve ourselves, not God or others (Ephesians 2:1-3), and the ability to obey comes only through God’s new creation (Ephesians 4:17-24).

One day, all these wrongs will be righted with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Until that day, our mandate remains as stewards over Earth. HMM III

Tuesday, August 11

Understanding Ownership

“The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” (Psalm 24:1)

The doctrine of creation is not merely a “scientific” debate. The opposite concepts of natural and evolutionary development versus the fiat creation of an omnipotent, omniscient, and transcendent Being impact every facet of our worldview. God owns the earth; He is its Creator (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1-2; Revelation 4:11; and hundreds of other passages throughout the Bible).

Christians who revere the biblical revelation of God are not to be in conflict with this most basic of all doctrines. God owns the living creatures that inhabit the earth (Psalm 50:10). He owns the metals that establish monetary value in the earth (Haggai 2:8). He claims ownership over our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19). He even states ownership of our very souls (Ezekiel 18:4). Nothing is excluded from the sphere of His ownership and kingship (1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Isaiah 45:12; Colossians 1:16-17). And we are to manage God’s resources as stewards of the Owner.

Lucifer’s error was that he thought he could become like the Owner, usurping all the rights and privileges of the Creator (Isaiah 14:12-14). Israel’s error was similar; they behaved as if their possessions were their own property (Malachi 3:8-10). The prodigal son claimed for himself the right of ownership and treated the money as if it were his own (Luke 15:12-14). The unfaithful steward made no effort to be productive (Matthew 25:24).

We have been delegated authority over the creation itself (Genesis 1:28), are required to be faithful with the “mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2), and are expected to administer “the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). May God preserve us from self-serving stewardship. HMM III

Understanding Management

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.” (Matthew 25:14)

Several kingdom parables in the New Testament provide glimpses into two major principles: God’s provision and our management of His wealth.

In the parable of the talents found in Matthew, the “talents” (money) belong to the “lord of those servants” (Matthew 25:19), and he gave to “every man according to his several ability” (Matthew 25:15). Each steward had the master’s confidence and trust, and success of enterprise depended upon the servant’s productivity. Each steward received varied amounts of resources according to the master, and the reward was based on faithful use of those resources.

Luke’s parallel account (Luke 19:13-27) focused on the percent of return. In both cases, the stewards were essentially asked, “What did you do with what you were given?” Each had enormous freedom in his management and the opportunity to demonstrate his capabilities.

God funds His work through His people. The funding of the tabernacle building project (Exodus 35) is a good example. The Israelites were recently freed slaves who had all been given gold by the Egyptians until there was more than enough.

The funding of the temple during David’s reign (1 Chronicles 28 and 29) is another excellent example. The leaders gave vast amounts of wealth and building materials, setting an example for the rest of the nation. Though they did not actually build it, they had the vision for it, and their children eventually did it. God works no miracles to meet critical needs except through the miraculous giving of His willing people. HMM III

Thursday, August 13

The Return to the Upper Room

“And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room....These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” (Acts 1:13-14)

What a myriad of thoughts must have been swirling through the believers’ heads as they walked back to Jerusalem after Christ ascended into heaven. They had many enemies in Jerusalem, but they walked fearlessly because He who claimed “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18) promised that “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (v. 20). They obediently assembled in “an upper room” (literally “the” upper room) to wait and pray.

Notice who is present. The list includes the 11 remaining disciples, reassembled after scattering. Peter, who had denied the Lord, had gained sweet forgiveness; doubting Thomas had his skepticisms answered; and John was there, the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” But even he had deserted his Lord in the garden as the soldiers came.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there. She had raised Him as a completely loving and obedient child, only to see Him ridiculed and opposed. She anguished as only a mother could, to see Him hanging on the tree, but her anguish had been quelled. At least two of her other sons were there, presumably New Testament authors James and Jude. Earlier, they had scoffed, but now they understood. Other women were also present, those who were the last ones at the cross and the first to see Him once the tomb had yielded up its dead. The entire group can be pictured as a trophy of His grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

They gathered together in perfect “accord,” a common bond of faith and purpose, praying and petitioning God for His will and power. Might we not see many examples for our lives and prayers in these verses? JDM

Logical Milk

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” (1 Peter 2:2)

This exhortation is directed to young Christians who have only recently trusted God’s enduring Word, preached to them in the saving gospel of Christ.

Because of this miracle of regeneration just experienced, a new Christian must now “[lay] aside [the verb form here means to ‘lay aside once and for all’] all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies” (1 Peter 2:1) and partake—as babes—of the “milk of sincerity.” The word for “sincere” means, literally, “without guile,” so he/she must now build all future progress in his/her new life not on guile but on guilelessness!

The phrase “of the word” is especially noteworthy. This is not the usual word for “word” (Greek *logos*) but a closely related word (*logikos*) from which we get our words “logic” and “logical.” It is used only one other time in the New Testament, where it is rendered “reasonable” in the classic passage dealing with “your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Thus, Peter is talking about partaking of a spiritual milk that is both logical and without guile. This can be nothing else (as seen in the context) than the incorruptible, eternal, regenerating Word of God and the living Word (Jesus Christ) revealed therein.

Now, the Lord Jesus is surely logical, for He is “the truth” (John 14:6). In this same chapter, Peter also notes that Christ was without guile (1 Peter 2:22). These attributes must be equally true of His written Word. The Scriptures are not full of secret meanings that only specially trained interpreters can fathom. They are sincere, meaning precisely what they say! Neither are they naive and unscientific but fully logical and correct in everything they say. Therefore, they are genuine spiritual nourishment for babes in Christ and will certainly enable them to “grow thereby.” HMM

Saturday, August 15

The Scattering Hammer

“Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29)

One of the most picturesque of the figures used to describe the Holy Scriptures is that of the hammer striking and shattering a rock. In this text, however, the “rock” is literally a mighty rock mountain.

Furthermore, the effect of the hammer is to “break in pieces.” This phrase actually is a single Hebrew word that normally means “disperse” or “scatter abroad,” usually used in describing the worldwide dispersion of the children of Israel. It was used even earlier for the first dispersion at Babel: “So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:8). Perhaps most significantly of all, it is used in the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7: “Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.”

This verse was quoted by the Lord Jesus just after the last supper and applied to Himself: “All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad” (Matthew 26:31). Combining all these themes, our text really seems to be saying: “Is not my word like a mighty hammer from heaven that shatters the great mountain and scatters it abroad?”

Our text is inserted in the midst of a stinging rebuke by Jeremiah of Israel’s false prophets, contrasting their lies with the mighty power of God’s true Word. Perhaps it is also a parable of the living Word, who is also the great Rock of ages as well as the loving Shepherd. When the Rock was shattered, the living stones were ejected from the Rock. The sheep that were thus scattered from the Shepherd became the spreading fire of the written Word, and “they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). HMM

Inheritance in Our Father's House

*“And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?”
(Genesis 31:14)*

This is the first mention of the word “inheritance” in the Bible, and, appropriately enough, its theme is the futility of basing one's future plans on the hope of any earthly estate.

No earthly inheritance could ever compare with “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18), with one exception—one heritage that the Lord does grant in this life: “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3). This promise no doubt applies to spiritual as well as physical children, but nowhere else in Scripture does God promise any kind of material inheritance to His loved ones. The reason for this exception is that the only material blessing capable of sharing our eternal inheritance is our children when we lead them to Christ.

Our real inheritance is called an “eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15), an “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled” (1 Peter 1:4), and a “glorious inheritance” (Ephesians 1:18). In one of the great Messianic psalms, the Lord Jesus, as the sin-bearing, suffering Son of man, testifies as follows: “The LORD is the portion of my inheritance....The lines [that is, the surveying lines bounding His ‘lot’] are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage” (Psalm 16:5-6). In fact, He has been “appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2).

We are sometimes better off with little or no earthly inheritance, but when we are born again through receiving the saving death and life of Christ, we become “children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16,17). In Christ, the Lord also becomes the portion of our inheritance. HMM

Monday, August 17

A Divine Mission

“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

This great challenge to Queen Esther by her cousin Mordecai, urging her to be willing to risk her own life to save the lives of her people, embodies a timeless principle that has challenged many another man or woman of God in later times. One thinks of Paul, for example, who could testify that “what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3:7) and whom, therefore, God used so greatly in the critical times of the early church.

Then there were Wycliffe, Hus, Martin Luther, and many others in post-biblical times who, like Paul, could say, “Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:24).

Who is to say that the same principle does not apply, at least in some measure, to everyone? Our role in history may not be as strategic and far-reaching as that of Queen Esther, but God does have a high calling in mind and a vital ministry of some sort for everyone. The great tragedy is that most people “hold their peace” when it comes to taking a vital and dangerous stand for God and His truth, and therefore “enlargement and deliverance” have to be raised up by Him “from another place.”

May God help each of us, called as we are to some significant ministry that we can best perform “at such a time as this,” to be able to say with Esther “If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16), but also with Paul “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). HMM

Rest and Work

“Come unto me, all ye that labor 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.” (Matthew 11:28-9)

There are many types of burdens we may try to carry. Consider the burdens of sorrow, pain, grief, fear, worry, and—above all—sin that plague us. In today’s text, Christ promises hope for the “heavy laden” if we will but come to Him and accept His gracious offer of salvation and cleansing. He will either remove the burden, lighten it, or give us strength to bear it, whichever is best. His offer of rest includes inward peace even in times of trouble here, and perfect peace hereafter.

It may sound paradoxical, but we can actually lighten our load by taking up His “yoke.” “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). In our text, Christ said we are to learn of Him, thus emulating His meekness and lowliness in heart as we carry our cross. If we accept His yoke in humility because of our love for Him, we can endure every hardship and bear every burden with hope and patience.

Even though we are children of the King, we still have work to do. It has always been so, for even sinless Adam and Eve were responsible for tending the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). God knew that idleness and lack of responsibility were improper. Likewise, in the future we will have responsibilities given to us according to the handling of our responsibilities in this life (Matthew 25:21). We may be co-regents of the kingdom (Revelation 20:6), but we will still have our responsibilities.

The burdens He gives us now are not oppressive, but with His help, and with the proper attitude, His yoke is easy and His burden is light. It is a “rest” to work for Him. JDM

Wednesday, August 19

Loving His Appearing

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8)

It is fascinating to learn that the Lord has a special reward for all those who “love his appearing.” The word “appearing” (Greek *epiphaneia*) can refer to either the first or second advent of Christ, depending on the context. Paul urges us to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). For “the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ...hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Our text for the day obviously refers to His Second Coming “at that day,” exhorting us not only to look for but to love His appearing! At that great day, “the Lord, the righteous judge” will award to those who have loved His appearing a special crown of righteousness. We have already received the imputed “gift of righteousness” (Romans 5:17) by His grace and have been “made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21), so this crown of righteousness somehow must be (as a wreath encircling the head of a victor in a race) an enveloping glow of divine appreciation for a godly life lived in daily anticipation of the Lord’s return.

The apostle John beautifully expressed the way in which such a life, loving Christ’s coming, produces a growing righteousness now and perfected righteousness then. “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.... We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 2:28; 3:2-3). HMM

Thursday, August 20

The Joy of the Lord

“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)

Jerusalem’s wall had been completed, God’s Word had been honored, and there was a great day of rejoicing. The real joy in the hearts of the people, however, was not their joy—it was the joy of the Lord. They rejoiced because He rejoiced, and they shared His joy.

The Lord’s joy is satisfied when His love is received and His purposes fulfilled. “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

To attain His joy, He must first redeem from the penalty of sin and death those whom He had created in His own image. Therefore, He “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

There will be a great day of rejoicing in the age to come when all the redeemed will be presented “faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24). Until that day, however, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).

Joy is in the Lord’s heart whenever His saving grace is received by a believing sinner. That same joy is likewise experienced by each believer whose testimony of life and word brings such a sinner to God.

Jesus said, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). His joy is our joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength. HMM

Friday, August 21

The Fear of the Lord

“Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.” (Psalm 34:11)

This psalm has been a source of great comfort and encouragement to many down through the years. The first section (vv. 1-7) of this acrostic hymn (the first letter of each verse begins with successive letters of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet) consists of the testimony of one who fears the Lord, and the last section (vv. 16-22) describes the deliverance promised those who do fear the Lord, contrasted with the destinies of those who don't. In the center section, David explains what it means to fear the Lord and invites all who read to join him in fearing God.

Here, the “fear of the LORD” is not so much an attitude as it is a life commitment. “What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?” (v. 12). A God-fearing man or woman desires a long life of ministry to others. “To die is gain” (Philippians 1:21), yes, but we should ask for lengthy opportunities to “see good.”

“Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Psalm 34:13). We know that the tongue is capable of incredible harm. The one who fears the Lord should be characterized by a lifestyle of guarded speech.

Not only is our speech to be free from evil, but we are to “depart from evil, and do good” (v. 14) in every area of life as well. Our life's motive should be to “seek peace, and pursue it.” Attaining peace may not be easy, but we should strive for it.

The results of such a lifestyle should be reward enough, but our gracious Lord promises even more: “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (v. 7).

“O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him” (Psalm 34:9). JDM

Saturday, August 22

To the Looking Glass

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” (James 1:23-25)

The Word of God is not a magic mirror, but if we seek real truths concerning ourselves, the biblical looking glass can bring great blessing. He who reads or hears the Word but does not believe or obey it is “a forgetful hearer” (v. 25) who is deceiving himself. It is these who merely “behold” themselves in the Word. The Greek word used here for “beholding” and “beholdeth” means “looking from a distance”—standing erect, as it were, while posing before the mirror. The man who “looketh into” the Word, on the other hand, “and continueth therein” being an obedient doer of its work is the one who receives eternal blessing. The Greek word here for “looketh” conveys the idea of intense scrutiny, requiring the one who is looking actually to stoop down in order to see. In fact, it is often translated “stoop down.”

As we allow the mirror of God’s Word to evaluate and correct our lives, “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).

Yet, this is only a token of what we can experience in the future. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Now we can see ourselves in the written Word. When we see the living Word, “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). HMM

Sunday, August 23

Like the Most High

“I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” (Isaiah 14:14)

These are two of the “I will’s” of Satan—or Lucifer—as he aspired to usurp the throne of God as ruler of the universe (see Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:11-17). Not content to be “the anointed cherub,” the highest of the angelic hierarchy (Ezekiel 28:14), he wanted to be God, and this monstrous pride became “the condemnation of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6) so that he is now “fallen from heaven” and will soon be “brought down to hell” (Isaiah 14:12, 15).

Lucifer, of course, is not the Creator, for he was “created” (Ezekiel 28:15) himself. It would seem therefore that for him to rationalize his ambition to be like the most High, he must somehow persuade himself that he is like the most High—that is, that God is a created being like himself and thus can be defeated. He only had God’s word that he had been created by Him, and he evidently chose not to believe what God said (just as do multitudes of men and women today).

He, like they, chose rather to believe that the eternal cosmos had somehow created them all by its own powers. The great cosmos (call it Mother Nature, perhaps) has “created” spirit beings, as well as men and women, and all the worlds inhabited by them. In this scenario, the true Creator God is viewed as only one of many. Therefore, He is vulnerable to defeat—or so Satan evidently believes.

Thus, Lucifer became the first evolutionist, and this great lie by which he deceived himself became the basis of his later deception of Eve and then of the founders of all the varied pantheistic religions of the world, as well as modern evolutionism and New Age philosophies. Nevertheless, God is still on His throne, and “the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings” (Revelation 17:14). HMM

Monday, August 24

The Great Divider

“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division.” (Luke 12:51)

From the very beginning, God has been a great divider. On the first day of creation, “God divided the light from the darkness”; on the second day, He “divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament” (Genesis 1:4, 7). When God first created humans, they walked together in sweet fellowship, but then sin came in and made a great division between humans and God. Nevertheless, “when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10).

The price has been paid for full reconciliation with our Creator, but “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19), so Christ Himself is now the One who divides. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

Jesus Christ divides all history and all chronology. Things either happened “Before Christ” (BC) or “in the Year of our Lord” (AD). People are either under the Old Covenant or the New Covenant. Most of all, He divides humanity. “There was a division among the people because of him” (John 7:43; see also John 9:16; 10:19). These divisions because of Him can cut very deep. “The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother” (Luke 12:53).

Finally, when He comes to judge all nations, “he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:32, 46). The division is life or death, light or darkness, heaven or hell, Christ or antichrist—and the choice is ours! HMM

Tuesday, August 25

The Wolf and the Lamb Together

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”
(Isaiah 11:6)

This scene seems impossible. Could it be merely an allegory? But that isn't all. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 65:25).

Whether this will all come to pass literally (and there is nothing in the context to cause us to question it), it definitely describes what God considers the ideal state of nature. In fact, in the original creation, all animals were herbivorous. “And God said, Behold,...to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so” (Genesis 1:29-30).

With humanity's fall into sin and God's resulting curse on the earth, this ideal state deteriorated. Teeth and claws, originally designed for digging roots and branches, began to be used for tearing and eating flesh. Even people were authorized by God to eat meat after the Flood (Genesis 9:3). It's still true, however, that both people and animals can survive on a non-carnivorous diet when necessary, for this was designed initially as the best way. All of this leads to the certain conclusion that God did not allow any such reign of tooth and claw on the earth before humans sinned. Those who promote the idea of long geological ages, with billions of animals suffering and dying during those ages, charge our God of wisdom and mercy with gratuitous cruelty. In a world made by a loving God, there could have been no death in the world until humans brought sin into the world (Romans 5:12). HMM

Wednesday, August 26

King at the Flood

“The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.” (Psalm 29:10-11)

There are quite a few different Hebrew words that are translated “flood” in the Old Testament. The word in this passage (Hebrew *mabbul*), however, is unique in that it is only used elsewhere in the account of the Noachic Flood, thus indicating conclusively that the dramatic scenes described in this psalm occurred at the time of the great Flood.

There was never in all history such a time as that, when “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). God therefore brought about “the end of all flesh” (v. 13)—no doubt millions, perhaps billions, of ungodly men and women—by the great *mabbul*.

In spite of the fact that nearly every culture around the globe (made up of descendants of the eight survivors of the Flood) remembers this terrible event in the form of “flood legends,” the very concept of God’s judgment on sin is so offensive to the natural mind that modern scholarship now even denies it as a fact of history.

Nevertheless, the epitaph of the antediluvian world is written in stone in the sedimentary rocks and fossil beds everywhere one looks all over the world. The greatest rebellion ever mounted against the world’s Creator by His creatures (both humans and fallen angels) was put down by God simply by His voice! “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters” (Psalm 29:3).

In all the great turmoil of the Flood, Noah and the righteous remnant in the Ark were safe through it all. In every age, even in times of stress and danger, “the LORD will bless his people with peace.” HMM

Thursday, August 27

Faith

“And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6)

It may come as a surprise to some that both Old and New Testament believers are justified only by faith. In fact, four New Testament epistles base their arguments on justification by faith on two Old Testament passages, each quoted three times but with each one emphasizing a different aspect.

In our text, we see that Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith (i.e., belief, same word). This verse is quoted in Romans 4:3 in the midst of a formal argument on the just nature of God and the fact that we are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Here, the emphasis is on *counted*. In Galatians 3:6, the word *believed* is emphasized, couched in the book dedicated to contrasting works and faith. “They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Galatians 3:9). The book of James was written to encourage believers to good works as evidence of their faith, and our text, quoted in James 2:23, emphasizes *righteousness*. “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

The other Old Testament passage dealing with faith, which is also quoted three times in the New Testament, reads, “The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). When used in Romans 1:17 just prior to the description of the evil lifestyles of the wicked (vv. 18-32), the emphasis seems to be on the word *just*. In Galatians 3:11, as noted above, the word *faith* is stressed. But in Hebrews 10:38, the author teaches that those who have been declared righteous by God *live* eternally by faith and will be able to cope with persecution (vv. 34-37).

Thus, the Old Testament doctrine that we are saved by faith in the work of God to solve our sin problem applies to every area of our lives and being, including our past sin, our present holy life and work, and our future eternal life. JDM

How the Earth Is Filled

“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14)

The very first command given to Adam and Eve was “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28). This might seem to imply there had been a previous population (so-called “pre-adamites”), but the word “replenish” (Hebrew *male*) means simply “fill.” Actually, in the King James Old Testament, it is translated by the Old English word “replenish” only seven times, whereas it is translated “fill,” “filled,” or “full” some 250 times. The precise meaning is “fill.”

Even today, with our so-called “population explosion,” the earth is far from being filled with people. One thinks of our vast deserts and inaccessible mountain ranges, plus the frozen wastes of Antarctica, for example. It may, however, once have been filled in the much more habitable world before the Flood, but it also was “filled with violence through them” (Genesis 6:11, 13). This, in fact, was the very reason God sent the great Flood to “destroy them with the earth.”

The time is coming, however, as seen in Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic vision as interpreted by Daniel the prophet, when a great stone—representing the future kingdom of God—will have “filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35). Then the great doxology of the psalmist will be reality: “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen” (Psalm 72:19).

The prophet Isaiah also spoke of this time: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). The later prophet Habakkuk in our text beautifully echoed these words of Isaiah. HMM

Saturday, August 29

His Master's Crib

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” (Isaiah 1:3)

What an indictment this is—not only against the people of Israel, but against men and women everywhere. All were created and made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) for fellowship with Him, but even His own chosen people rejected Him, and most people everywhere all but ignore Him in their daily lives.

“Crib” is the same as “manger,” and when God became man, His human parents “laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7) since there was no room for Him anywhere else. The animals knew Him, and so did the angels, but His people were unconcerned. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not” (John 1:10).

When He came into Jerusalem offering Himself as King of Israel, He rode on an unbroken colt, “whereon yet never man sat,” and the little “foal of an ass” (Luke 19:30; Zechariah 9:9) willingly submitted, knowing his divine Master and Maker. But the people of Jerusalem as a whole joined in clamoring for His crucifixion just a few days later.

The indictment against Israel could be lodged with even greater justification against America today. “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth:...I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me” (Isaiah 1:2). The morals of our people seem to have been turned upside down, and God would say to us also: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20).

Yet—in modern America, as well as in ancient Israel—“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). HMM

Milk or Meat

“For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”
(Hebrews 5:13-14)

The Scriptures are compared in these verses to our daily food—milk and meat. Milk is the necessary food for babies (1 Peter 2:2), but it becomes grotesque when a baby continues year after year as a baby, still incapable of partaking of anything but milk. This was the case with the Corinthian Christians who were, according to Paul, “babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). It was also true for these Hebrew Christians: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again...the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12).

Sad to say, this is still the situation with most Christian people today, even in Bible-believing churches. This is indicated not only by the many carnal divisions between them (1 Corinthians 3:3), but even more by the frothy nature of the Christian materials they read, almost always centered on introspective personal relationships rather than on the person of Christ, the deeper truths of Scripture, and the great purposes of God. The time spent in personal Bible study is minimal, and even most sermons repeatedly serve up milk for Christian babes rather than strong meat for spiritually healthy Christians “of full age” whose “senses” have already been strengthened by use to recognize the true and the false, the good and the evil. How urgently we need to heed the last words of the apostle Peter just before his martyrdom: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). HMM

Monday, August 31

The Omniscience of God

“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.” (Psalm 139:1)

The marvelous 139th Psalm consists of a prayer by King David to his King, the omniscient, omnipresent, holy Creator God, the King of kings. In this psalm David reflects on and praises God for His majestic attributes, and by doing so is driven to introspection.

David claims that God knows when we sit down or stand up (v. 2). He even knows our thoughts (v. 2). Furthermore, He knows our direction and habits (v. 3). He knows our words better than we do ourselves (v. 4). In everything, God knows and guides (v. 5). “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me” (v. 6), David claims, and neither he nor we, trapped as we are in finiteness, can comprehend this omniscience.

Where can we go to escape His omnipresence (v. 7)? Neither to heaven nor hell (v. 8). Not to the air or the sea (v. 9). Neither darkness nor light (vv. 11-12) can shield us from His presence. In all, He leads and guides (v. 10).

Thinking such lofty thoughts should compel us to praise and thankfulness as it did David, especially as it relates to our own creation and growth. God knew us in the womb (v. 13) and controlled each stage of our embryonic development (vv. 14-16). He knew and planned all the events of our lives (v. 16). “How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!” (v. 17). They are innumerable (vv. 17-18).

Reflection on God’s holiness makes David painfully aware of his own sinfulness, as it should us. Recognition of God’s nature should bring us to a place of submission and a desire for holiness, as well as a yearning to follow fully the omniscient God. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (vv. 23-24). JDM



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