



Days of Praise

September • October • November 2018

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

September • October • November 2018

*“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed,
shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
bringing his sheaves with him.”
(Psalm 126:6)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.” (Psalm 5:8)

Dear Christian friend,

Every one of us leads others for good or ill. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ, our businesses, and our own civil government are in need of good leaders.

The Bible is not without encouraging information about the role and character of good leadership. We are fortunate to have the inspired records of the lives of great men of the past like Moses and Joshua who were given enormous responsibility.

Within the circumstances of their lives are many excellent examples and principles that can help us with our specific responsibilities. Those principles are valid whether we are leading thousands or striving to set a good example for our families. Good leadership, to say nothing of godly leadership, is part of the “good gift and every perfect gift [that] is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

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Saturday, September 1

Leadership Preparation

“Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3:10)

Moses was 80 years old when God issued this official call for him to lead Israel out of slavery and head up a new nation. Many people had been used by God to prepare Moses for that moment—including a wicked Pharaoh who “knew not Joseph” (Exodus 1:8) and who set awful taskmasters over Israel to keep them subjugated (Exodus 1:10-11).

When that failed to contain them, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all male newborns, but Shiphrah and Puah (the “bosses” of the midwives) refused, lied to Pharaoh, and allowed the nation to grow “very mighty” (Exodus 1:20).

Moses’ mother, Jochebed, made special provisions to save him, caring for him secretly at home for three months (Exodus 2:2). When that was no longer possible, she prepared an “ark” and put Moses in the reeds with his sister, Miriam, to watch over him (Exodus 2:3-4).

The daughter of Pharaoh “had compassion” on Moses and accepted Miriam’s offer to find a Hebrew woman to nurse him. Jochebed was given the task until he was taken into Pharaoh’s house (Exodus 2:5-10), where he was educated by the greatest empire on Earth at that time.

All of that and every one of these people were involved in preparing Moses for his leadership role. Even the evil Pharaoh and the awful condition of the Israelites were part of the human drama God used to bring about the exodus of Israel. We may not be privileged to see God’s plan unfolding in our lives, but be sure that “he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4). HMM III

Sunday, September 2

Leadership Training

*“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.”
(Exodus 3:1)*

Moses was 40 years old when he began to recognize the burdens of Israel (Exodus 2:11). He expected acceptance because of his position in society, but they rejected his potential help and leadership (Exodus 2:13-14).

Moses attached himself to the family of Jethro in Midian, married Zipporah, fathered a son, and spent 40 years herding sheep before he heard from God (Exodus 3:1-2). Most of us need God’s training in humility before we can assume real servant leadership (Matthew 20:26-28).

Once God got Moses’ attention with the sight of a burning bush that was not consumed, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses out of the bush (Exodus 3:2), demanding that he immediately submit to God’s authority in worship and deference (Exodus 3:5-6). God’s leaders will be God’s servants or they will not lead God’s people.

No doubt the burden that had been simmering in Moses’ heart over the decades was stirred to life again when God Himself identified with the affliction of Israel’s slavery (Exodus 3:7-9). But that renewed passion was tested when God insisted that Moses would be sent to do God’s work (Exodus 3:10).

Moses needed to be told and shown several times that whatever he lacked God would supply before he yielded to God’s order to “go!” (Exodus 4:12). Godly leaders can feel inadequate to the task God has set before them (Exodus 3:11), but God never assigns a task for which He does not empower the servant with the spirit “of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). HMM III

Monday, September 3

The Gift of Labor

“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” (Genesis 2:15)

When God first created man, He gave him work to do. Although “the LORD God planted a garden” for man (Genesis 2:8), it was up to man to take care of it if he would continue to eat its fruits. Thus, having to labor for one’s living is not a divine punishment for man’s sin as people sometimes interpret it, but rather a divine benefit for man’s good.

Similarly, even in the new earth, when sin and suffering will be gone forever, there will still be work to do. “There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him” (Revelation 22:3).

We don’t know yet what our assignments will be *there*, but they will somehow be commensurate with our faithfulness in serving the Lord *here*. “My reward is with me,” says the Lord Jesus, “to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12).

It is, therefore, a God-given privilege to be able to do useful work, whether that work consists of preaching God’s Word or improving God’s world. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do” (whether being paid for it or not), “do it with thy might; for there is no work . . . in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). As Jesus said, “The night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

No matter what the job may be that has been provided for us to do, it is important to remember and obey the admonition: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24) and “your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). HMM

Tuesday, September 4

Leadership Challenges

“And Moses spake before the LORD, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?” (Exodus 6:12)

Once the mantle of leadership has been accepted, God expects an unreserved commitment to follow through with the task. Moses had to leave Midian and likely saw little of his family afterward (Exodus 4:18-31). Jesus noted, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

Rarely is leadership simple or easy. Moses must first meet with and win over the elders (Exodus 3:16). Nor is it likely the people would fall in line without a challenge. Moses felt the rejection of Israel long before he received their honor (Exodus 6:9-27).

Opposition from the godless is a given. Our Lord Jesus taught, “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). Moses faced the power and wrath of the court of Egypt (Exodus 5:2), which extended that power through their taskmasters to the people of Israel (Exodus 5:10-11).

The Lord is obviously in charge of events. “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them” (Exodus 7:5). God always has a reason for His actions. Human leaders are His means to accomplish His purpose.

Also, the direct purpose will not overshadow the long-term objective. “And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them among the countries; and they shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 30:26). Human leaders seldom see the ultimate purpose fulfilled in history, but they will know the reality of it in eternity (1 Corinthians 13:12). HMM III

Wednesday, September 5

Leadership Situational Awareness

“Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.”
(Exodus 7:2-3)

When God calls a dedicated leader into His service, He almost always gives a vision to go with that calling. With Moses, the vision was given at the beginning, specified in advance throughout the implementation, and reiterated as the great exodus came to fruition.

The 10 plagues were thrusts from the mouth of God at the gods of Egypt’s polytheistic pantheon. Just so, our warfare is “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Just as Moses was told Pharaoh would resist each display of God’s power, so we are told to “be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Yet, even the Enemy of God’s people is subject to the Word of the Creator. While Satan may “roar” and “devour,” he will also “flee” when God’s leaders “submit . . . to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

There are times when the bad guys seem to have it their way. God does not see time the same way we do and will expect His godly saints to wait patiently for Him. Our instructions are to not be “envious against the workers of iniquity” but to “trust,” “delight,” and “commit” our way to the Lord, “and he shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:1-5). HMM III

Thursday, September 6

Leadership Transfer

“Now after the death of Moses . . . the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan.”
(Joshua 1:1-2)

The Lord’s ministries are many and varied—even among the churches Jesus established on Earth. Leaders of those churches and of the many groups that serve the churches add layers of character and skills that must be replaced. As expected, the Bible is not silent on this important matter.

The replacement should be identified, trained, and ready before needed. “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd” (Numbers 27:16-17).

By the time the earlier leader dies, God has already selected His next leader. “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1). “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (1 Corinthians 3:9-10).

The work of God’s Kingdom will continue with or without you. “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself” (Galatians 6:3). “So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7). “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14). HMM III

Friday, September 7

Leadership Advance

“Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.” (Joshua 1:2)

There are a number of things God’s leaders need to keep in mind as they move forward in God’s work.

Make sure the people you need are with you. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

Make sure you are leading the people where God has led you. “That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deuteronomy 16:20). “But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it” (Numbers 14:24). “Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children’s for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God” (Joshua 14:9).

Make sure you are setting the right example as you advance. “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men” (Titus 3:8). “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1). “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8). HMM III

Saturday, September 8

Leadership Anticipation

“Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.” (Joshua 1:6)

Those called to leadership in the Lord need to carefully ready themselves for that work.

Make sure that you ask for and are following the Lord’s leading. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8).

Make sure that you are asking in the right spirit. “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8). “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

Make sure your motives are above reproach. “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:1-2). “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). HMM III

Sunday, September 9

Fearless Leadership

“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law . . . turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.” (Joshua 1:7)

God expects His appointed leaders to cultivate both inner and outer strength.

God’s leaders must have both physical strength and spiritual courage. These comparative terms are cited together in 18 different passages of the Old Testament—always to emphasize the need for both. “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14). “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:24). Although bodily exercise is of little profit (1 Timothy 4:8), our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and should be kept strong for God’s work (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Spiritual courage tends to be weakened when the physical body is weakened.

God’s leaders need both strength and courage to obey God’s call and be successful in the ministry. The apostle Paul was shaken by such physical torment that “we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: . . . but God . . . delivered us from so great a death” (2 Corinthians 1:8-10). Human weariness can rob us of the “well doing” that would otherwise reap success (Galatians 6:9). God is certainly the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17)—including our physical strength. “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). HMM III

Monday, September 10

Focused Leadership

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” (Joshua 1:8)

Those whom God calls into spiritual leadership are required to keep their spiritual eyes on eternity because “the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Godly leaders must know and use the Scriptures. The Word of God is eternal (Matthew 24:35) and more powerful than any other tool God has provided for us (Hebrews 4:12). If God’s leaders are to prosper in their work, they must build a cache of the Word to keep their “way” clean (Psalm 119:9-10).

Godly leaders must absorb the Scriptures. Those who lead others may not “walk,” “stand,” or “sit” in the lifestyle of wickedness (Psalm 1:1). To the contrary, they must delight and meditate in God’s Word “day and night” (Psalm 1:2). The psalmist once said, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11).

Godly leaders focus on obedience to the Scriptures. Another psalmist sought for such leaders when he asked, “Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise? Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times” (Psalm 106:2-3). Jesus insisted His disciples seek the Kingdom first (Matthew 6:33) if they would know the blessings of worry-free living. Peter simply said, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16). HMM III

Tuesday, September 11

A Response to Threat

“He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor the arrow that flieth by day.” (Psalm 91:4-5)

Today we remember the unprovoked attack on America by Muslim terrorists. Despite attempts to make the country more secure, the threat remains scarcely abated. What should the Christian’s response be? In our text above, we see we have no cause for fear. The physical danger may be real, but our Lord promises protection in tender words likened to a mother bird’s care for her young. Our ultimate deliverance is guaranteed by His sure promises. Trust in His power and truth sustains us as surely as a shield and buckler.

Our hope cannot rest in military might. God does not promise temporal safety to all, for millions have succumbed to undeserved violence. Our last hope is of a different order, firmly grounded in “the LORD, which is my refuge” (v. 9). He responds to our trust and worship with the promise “with long [better translated as ‘eternal’] life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation” (v. 16). Much more interested in our response to troubles than in our deliverance, He desires us to believe and serve Him, trusting Him even in perilous times.

A New Testament application of this principle is in 1 Peter 3:14: “If ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.” The remedy? “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

Jesus Christ is our example and inspiration. “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3). Fixing our eyes upon Him, we have no cause for fear. JDM

Wednesday, September 12

Formidable Leadership

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” (Joshua 1:9)

“All [leaders] that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Those who disciple others must be able to live among “many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9).

Godly leaders must not be afraid to confront evil. Embracing a lifestyle of rightness often brings open hostility from others. But “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). “Speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) does not negate the responsibility to demand that “God be true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4).

Godly leaders cannot be dismayed by resistance. “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (Psalm 37:1-2). Our Creator is on the throne of eternity. He is the Alpha and Omega. “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).

Godly leaders need not fear man’s words or looks. Children used to say “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” The Bible is more accurate: “Be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 2:6). HMM III

Thursday, September 13

Ruling Leadership

“Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.”
(Joshua 1:10-11)

God’s leaders are expected to exercise authority, but they must be careful to do it in God’s name and be mindful of the examples they set.

Leadership requires command.

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

Leadership must command in God’s name.

“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Leadership serves as examples to those being led.

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3). HMM III

Friday, September 14

Reminding Leadership

“Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land.” (Joshua 1:13)

Repetition undergirds the purpose of action. King David exhorted God’s people to “remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth” that they “might observe his statutes, and keep his laws” (Psalm 105:5, 45). Paul told young Timothy that he was to “put the brethren in remembrance of these things” because they would be “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6). Both Old and New Testament leaders insisted that they would “not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things,” since those reminders would establish them “in the present truth” (2 Peter 1:12).

Repetition will encourage everyone. The early church leaders returned to the churches they had started, “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22). Peter insisted that he wanted to “stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Peter 3:1-2).

Repetition solidifies the message. The psalmist Asaph promised the Lord, “I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old” (Psalm 77:10-11). God assured us that the Scriptures were “breathed out” by God and therefore are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). HMM III

Saturday, September 15

The Pragmatic Life

“And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.” (Luke 19:13)

This “parable of the pounds” indicated to His disciples that they should not wait idly for the second coming of Christ, thinking “that the kingdom of God should immediately appear” (Luke 19:11), but that they should stay busy, using whatever abilities and opportunities they had in the Lord’s service until His return. The word “occupy” is an unusual word, the Greek *pragmatenomai*, from which we derive our modern word “pragmatic,” meaning “practical,” and it only occurs this one time in the New Testament.

There is another related word, however, also occurring only one time, in 2 Timothy 2:4: “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.” Here the word “affairs” is the Greek *pragmateia*, and Paul is cautioning those who would be “good soldiers of Jesus Christ” against becoming involved in the pragmatic affairs of civilian or business life, if they would really be pleasing to their commanding officer.

At first, there seems to be a contradiction. Jesus says to stay busy with the practical affairs of life until He returns. Paul says not to get involved with pragmatic things.

There is no real contradiction, of course, if motivation is considered. Whatever may be our vocation in life, as led by the Lord, we are to perform that job and all the other daily responsibilities of life diligently and faithfully, for His sake.

If we allow these things to become an end in themselves, however, or use them for other purposes than for His glory, then we have, indeed, become tangled up in the affairs of this life, and this displeases Him. He desires that we be diligent in whatever He has called us to do until He comes, but to be sure it is for Him, not for ourselves. HMM

Sunday, September 16

Three Worldly Powers

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

This well-known passage identifies three fountainheads of ungodly power that will, if unchecked and unguarded, ensnare a believer into a sinful lifestyle.

Sensual power (lust of the flesh) is a body-oriented and emotion-driven reaction to fleshly appetites that can never please God (Romans 8:8) and is in constant warfare with the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:17). We are told to “flee” these “youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22) that are a “corruption” (2 Peter 1:4) of the “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) God-designed human body.

Visual power (lust of the eyes) is an intellect-oriented and imagination-driven stimulation of wishful thinking that will take control of behavior (Matthew 6:22-23) if not carefully curtailed (Job 31:1; 2 Peter 2:14). Although impacting men more than women, this kind of “lust” will “conceive” sin instead of merely reacting to it (James 1:13-15).

Personal power (the pride of life) is a self-oriented and ego-driven desire for dominance that has no ethic or limiting factor other than the praise of men, not God (John 12:43). Such pride, dominated by the “natural mind” (1 Corinthians 2:14) and a “deceitful” heart (Jeremiah 17:9), spirals into a self-love that twists and distorts human behavior into a litany of ungodliness that loves pleasure rather than God (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Giving in to these “worldly” powers may grant us pleasures for “a season” (Hebrews 11:25), but will surely make us an “enemy of God” (James 4:4). May our Lord Jesus grant that we stay armed against such “wiles” (Ephesians 6:11), covered and protected with the “whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:13-17). HMM III

Monday, September 17

The Name above Every Name

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.” (Philippians 2:9)

Three primary names for God are used in the Old Testament: *Elohim*, *Jehovah*, and *Adonai*. In the New Testament, both *Jehovah* and *Adonai* are translated as “Lord” (Greek *kurios*) and applied to Christ. This word is also applied occasionally to human “lords” but is specifically used as a name or title of God or Christ no less than 663 times.

His human name was *Jesus* (“Jehovah is Savior”), but this is used by itself only 22 times in the epistles—always with special emphasis on His humanity. Although it was the common name used repeatedly in the gospel narratives, it is significant that the disciples and other believers almost always addressed Him personally as “Lord,” never simply as “Jesus.” Unbelievers and demons, on the other hand, *never* addressed Him as “Lord.”

The name “Christ” means “anointed one” and is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*. Thus, Christ is His divine title as God’s “anointed” prophet, priest, and king; Jesus is His human name, as our example and Savior; Lord is His title of spiritual relationship to those He has saved. All three names are of paramount importance. Thus, Peter said: “God hath made that same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). His “full name,” so to speak, is therefore “the Lord Jesus Christ.” This complete name is used over 100 times; “Christ” and “Lord” are used even more.

In the great testimony of His coming exaltation, Paul says He has been given “the name” (the definite article is in the original) above every name. At this “name of Jesus” (with the “of” indicating the possessive—that is, “the name now belonging to the man Jesus who died on the cross”), every knee must bow, and every tongue must someday confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10-11). HMM

Tuesday, September 18

Identifying Antichrists

“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.” (1 John 2:18)

Evangelicals expect “the” Antichrist to be revealed in the future, yet there are more warnings about “many” antichrists who are currently and actively plotting evil. John lists two specific identifying factors that enable us to spot these “anti” Christs.

“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22).

“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist . . . and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4:3).

This much is clear. Anyone who refuses to accept the incarnated Christ as the Son of God is *anti*-Christ. Perhaps we need to see this term in its simplicity. Those who are “anti” Christ (oppose, reject, against, opposite to, before, instead of, in place of) *are* antichrists!

Peter warns that false prophets and false teachers are also “anti” Christ—and that they may well come from among the Lord’s visible Kingdom.

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

Thus, we are told that Satan’s “ministers also [are] transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:15). No wonder we should have caution. This is the last time (days), and we need to be alert! HMM III

Wednesday, September 19

To Die Is Gain

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

Although the glorious resurrection bodies that have been promised all believers must await the return of Christ, even the spirit-existence after death is better than this present life for the believer. Paul himself expressed “a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (v. 23)—“to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Thus, it is “gain” when a Christian dies! Since Christ, in His resurrection body, is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, the spirits of “sleeping” Christians are also there. The intermediate state is somewhat analogous to the dreaming state, in which the consciousness travels to various places and experiences while the body is asleep. In fact, death is called “sleep” for the Christian (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

However, in some amazing way, these conscious spirits of believers are still distinct and recognizable. Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:3), as well as Samuel (1 Samuel 28:12-19), were identifiable in their spirit-form, even by people here on Earth.

One of the greatest blessings of dying and going to be with the Lord will be the joy of returning with Him “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13). “Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. . . . And the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16), just before the “rapture” and glorification of the saints who are still living. As wonderful as it might be to live until Christ returns, it will be even better to be with Him!

The death of a Christian, therefore, may be a time of loss and grief for those left behind, but it is a time of joy and blessing for the one who dies, including a happy reunion with those who have gone before. HMM

Thursday, September 20

Whom Do You Know?

“For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12)

A person who *thinks* he is a Christian, or *hopes* he is a Christian, probably *isn't* a Christian. One should know, when it comes to this most important of all questions. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). It’s a matter of *who* you know, not *what* you know. Paul said: “I know *whom* I have believed”—that is, he knew the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

But just *how* can we know that we have eternal life? In the first place, we know because He has said so in His Word. Furthermore, He knows us! “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

We also “know . . . that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13), which “beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). If the Holy Spirit truly has become a part of our lives (as He surely has if we genuinely came to Christ as lost sinners, trusting Him alone for forgiveness and salvation, and yielding our lives and eternal souls to Him), then we will also come to love the Word which He inspired. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. . . . But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:3, 5).

There are many other things we can know when we know we are saved. Best of all, “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). HMM

Friday, September 21

The Similitude of God

*“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.”
(James 3:9)*

Here inserted within a very sober condemnation of the misuse of our God-given privilege of speech is what seems almost an incidental reference to the image of God in man. It is not a trivial reference, however, but very significant.

It tells us that even though the image of God in man has been severely marred by sin, it is still there! That is, man is eternal just as God is eternal, and we will all continue to exist forever, either in the presence of God, or away from His presence. That “image” is not shared with animals, even the higher animals. The latter do have a body, soul (in the sense of mind), and spirit (in the sense of breath), but they do not possess “the image of God” that was specially created in man alone after all the animals had been created (note Genesis 1:21, 27).

Another implication is that the word “similitude” includes the meaning of a physical resemblance. While God in His full essence is omnipresent and therefore invisible to human eyes, it is still true that, when God became man, He took on an actual physical body. Furthermore, our Lord Jesus, God the Son, still is “that same Jesus” and therefore still in that body (note Acts 1:11; 1 John 3:2; etc.).

Since His incarnation and His work of salvation were planned by the triune God “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20), man was apparently created in the image of that body that Christ had planned to take on when He would eventually become man.

That being the case, our bodies are even more sacred than otherwise we might have assumed, and it is indeed a serious matter to misuse the tongue or any other member of the body, which is made after the similitude of Christ. HMM

Saturday, September 22

Propitiation

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:2)

Most words in the King James Bible have one or two syllables. Our text verse, for example, has 21 such short words and only one big word; but that word, “propitiation,” has five syllables, and so has elicited much complaint from folks who don’t like to use dictionaries. What does “propitiation” mean?

The Greek word is *hilasmos* and occurs just two other times. These are as follows:

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

As an aside, note that these two verses contain two words of two syllables, three of three syllables, and 48 of one syllable. But both also include “propitiation,” and that seems to be a problem. Nevertheless, “propitiation” is certainly the most accurate word to convey the meaning of the original. The dictionary gives “expiation” and “conciliation” as definitions, but that probably doesn’t help much.

In any case, the action of the Lord Jesus in submitting His body to be a substitutionary sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins and to endure God’s wrath against all the sins of the world, thereby enabling Him to be reconciled to us, with Christ’s perfect righteousness credited to our account, is seen in these three verses to be a basic theme of this great truth of Christ’s propitiatory work on the cross. And surely, as John says: “Herein is love,” that God would so love us that He would offer up His Son, and Christ would so love us that He would die for us. Surely, this is love! HMM

Sunday, September 23

What Do Fig Trees Do?

“Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”
(James 3:12)

The answer to these rhetorical questions obviously is “No.” A fig tree cannot become an olive tree in one growing season, or in a million of them. Nor can a grapevine evolve into a fig tree, no matter what happens to it (grafts, mutations, chemicals, radiations, anything).

In the very first chapter of the Bible, each kind of plant God created was given the genetic information by its Maker to “reproduce” only its own “kind” of plant, not to diverge into some other kind, although its offspring could develop into many varieties of the parental kind (but even that only within strict limits). The same was true with the animals. Ten times in Genesis 1, God, in five verses, tells us that each created kind of plant and animal was coded to reproduce just its own kind (Genesis 1:11-12, 21, 24-25).

Just in the event that some skeptic might reject Genesis 1 as factual, the same theme is reiterated in the New Testament, not only in our text but in Paul’s great chapter on death and resurrection. “God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds” (1 Corinthians 15:38-39).

This biblical truth is confirmed by every scientific observation ever made on plants and animals—whether living, dead, or fossilized. No one has ever seen a frog evolve into a prince, or a vine into an olive tree, either in the present or in the fossil record of the past. “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that man should fear before him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). HMM

Monday, September 24

Boldness in Prayer

“In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” (Ephesians 3:12)

There is a wonderful exhortation and promise in Hebrews 4:15-16: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted [that is, ‘tested’] like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

We aren’t to come *presumptuously* or *arrogantly* to God in prayer, but we *can* come *boldly*! This is not by virtue of our own merits but because Christ Himself has opened the way for us. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Because He has been fully tested yet free from sin, and because of the shed “blood of Jesus” and the opened veil “through his flesh,” if we come “by the faith of him,” we do have “access” to God’s “throne of grace” and can boldly present our petitions. These must, of course, be dependent upon His will, for “this is the confidence [same Greek word as ‘boldness’] that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And . . . we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

But, whether a particular request is granted or denied in accord with God’s greater wisdom, or whether the answer is delayed until God’s more propitious time, we can always “find grace to help in time of need.” He is our great high priest, our mediator, our advocate with the Father, our intercessor, and we can surely pray with “boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” HMM

Tuesday, September 25

How to Know the Will of God

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

The key to knowing God’s will is willingness and determination to follow it before knowing it. “If any man will [literally ‘wills to’] do his will, he shall know” (John 7:17).

The best indicator whether one is really willing to follow God’s will is whether or not he is now following that part of His will that is *already* known as revealed in His Word. This requires first knowing and believing, then obeying the Word, especially those portions dealing with God’s general will for all Christians. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105). Then, if one indeed is following the revealed will of God, he may ask in confidence (1 John 5:14-15) for the Lord to indicate His will in a specific matter on which there is no explicit biblical teaching (see also James 1:5-6).

God will then answer, though it may not be immediately. “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). It may not be in accordance with our preferences or personal judgment, but it will always be for the ultimate best. “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit . . . maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:26-28).

God will lead in two ways in the absence of specific Scripture guidance (which must always take precedence, of course). One is by providential circumstances, the other by inner witness of the Spirit, and these two must agree. Then, if all the terms have been met, one should proceed to follow God’s will as best he can, knowing that God will redirect him if he has made a mistake. God does want us to know His will, and He will “direct our paths.” HMM

Wednesday, September 26

But When You Sin

“And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1)

There is no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that any person can be sinless. “All have sinned” (Romans 3:23), the Bible boldly declares. “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). Repentance toward God (Acts 20:21) and salvation by God (2 Corinthians 7:10) eternally settles the issue of the sinful *condition* inherent in us (Ephesians 2:1-8). However, even though we have been “made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21), we still commit sinful acts (1 John 1:8-10)!

Hallelujah for the *Advocate*! What a blessed promise it is that is recorded for us that the same Jesus Christ who died for our sins, who rose from the grave in glorious victory over sin, “is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34).

Although our security in the completed work of Christ Jesus is “for ever” (Hebrews 10:12), our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14) stands ready to rebut the constant efforts of Satan to flaunt our sins before the holy throne of God (Revelation 12:10). We have no standing there on our own. Our life, even though forgiven and rescued from sin, still is tainted with the deeds and consequences of evil choices. Even the body in which we live houses “no good thing” (Romans 7:18).

Were it up to us to be holy, we would quickly be defamed by the reality of our life. The child of God, though redeemed by “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19), has no ability to plead Christ’s work in person before the throne. “Wherefore he [Jesus] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). HMM III

Thursday, September 27

Our Eternal Bodies

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Philippians 3:21)

Only those religions that believe in special creation—that is, orthodox Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—also believe in a bodily resurrection. Of the three creationist/resurrectionist religions, however, only the Christian faith acknowledges that the resurrection can be possible only when the Creator Himself becomes the atoning Savior, dying for sin and thereby defeating death.

When Christ arose from the tomb, He could proclaim, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore” (Revelation 1:18). His resurrection body was the same physical body that had been in the grave, able to be touched and even retaining its crucifixion scars. Nevertheless, it was different, a “spiritual” body (1 Corinthians 15:42-49), controlled by spiritual forces. Our present “natural” bodies are controlled by natural forces, but the resurrected Christ could move quickly from Earth to heaven, and could pass through closed doors (John 20:17, 19, 26).

But *our* resurrection bodies will be like His someday, according to the “working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19-20). By that same “working,” He is able to subdue all things, for He is the Creator of all things (Colossians 1:16). Our “vile” bodies will become “glorious” bodies, no longer subject to sickness and aging, or lusts and evil passions. “This corruptible shall have put on incorruption” (1 Corinthians 15:54). “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). This is the blessed hope of the genuine Christian. HMM

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars.” (Proverbs 9:1)

The foundation of the house of wisdom is “the fear of the LORD. . . the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). One does not finally reach the Lord through much study and the acquisition of much wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the very “*beginning* of wisdom.” Without a reverent trust in the God of creation and redemption, there can be no *true* wisdom. “For other foundation can no man lay than . . . Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Then, erected upon this foundation and supporting all the superstructure of the “house of wisdom” are seven mighty pillars or columns. But what are these? The answer seems to be found in that New Testament book of wisdom, the book of James, where it is said that “if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God” (James 1:5). Then, “a wise man and endued with knowledge . . . [will] show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13).

Finally, the seven great pillars seem to be listed in James 3:17: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” The first in the list or central column, carrying more weight than any of the other columns in the structure, is *purity*. Then there are six outside pillars. One is *peaceableness*; the next is *gentleness*; then comes *reasonableness* (“easy to be entreated”). The next phrase, “full of mercy and good fruits,” connotes *helpfulness*. The term for “without partiality” actually means *humility*, and then the final pillar is *sincerity*.

Thus, a life of genuine wisdom is a life founded upon the fear of the Lord and supported by genuine purity, peaceableness, gentleness, reasonableness, helpfulness, humility, and sincerity. Such a house will never fall! HMM

Saturday, September 29

The New, Old Commandment

“Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment. . . . Again, a new commandment I write unto you.” (1 John 2:7-8)

On the surface, this passage appears to be a real problem. The easily seen focus of the “commandment” is love for the brethren (vv. 9-11). The difficult wording lies in the “old” and the “new” side of the same thought.

The “old” sense of the command to love is as eternal as the very nature of God Himself. Whatever love we express in our human nature derives its source from God who *is* love (1 John 4:16). Even “from the beginning” (1 John 2:7) humanity was charged with the commitment of marital love (Genesis 2:24), which is the earthly example of God’s love for His church (Ephesians 5:25).

Then as God codified His “rules” for those who would submit to His authority, God insisted that we were to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18). Centuries later as the apostle Paul commented on the Mosaic Law, it was noted that “love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).

The “new” side of the commandment has its “beginning” with the institution of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:13) and the commissioning of the apostolic leadership (John 13:34). The new focus would be on the spiritual kingdom rather than the earthly nation, and the “brethren” would not merely be genetically related but have a spiritual “new birth”(Acts 10:34-35; Galatians 3:28).

Since “the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth” (1 John 2:8), “he that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him” (1 John 2:10). This new command goes beyond marriage and nation to the entire family of God. HMM III

Sunday, September 30

Bearing and Helping to Bear

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. . . . For every man shall bear his own burden.” (Galatians 6:2, 5)

This is one of the most commonly cited Bible “contradictions,” the apostle Paul commanding us, almost in the same breath, to bear other people’s burdens and yet to bear our own burdens. There is, however, no real contradiction, and both commands are equally valid and important.

The problem is partly one of translation. There are two Greek words used here, *baros* and *phortion*, respectively. The first means “heavy load,” the second “responsibility.”

When a Christian friend has been stricken with a great burden—whether sickness, financial need, death of a loved one, or even a grievous sin in his life that he has been unable to overcome by his own strength (see verse 1)—he needs desperately the love and support of his Christian brethren. The Scripture assures us that when we help relieve this burden, we “fulfill the law of Christ.” The previous chapter also notes this: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Galatians 5:14).

At the same time, the privilege of having Christian friends who will share and help with an otherwise unbearable load does not at all absolve us from the responsibility of doing our own part in carrying out our God-given responsibilities. There is no place in the Christian warfare for Christian beggars or Christian crybabies. “Study to be quiet, and to do your own business. . . . That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

The preceding verse (Galatians 6:4) had urged that “every man prove his own work.” Since God has both created and redeemed us, we can be sure He is concerned about us and will not allow trials, or place upon us duties, that are greater than we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). HMM

Monday, October 1

The Ministry of Reconciliation

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

The great work of reconciling lost men to a holy God has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ, yet He “hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation,” through which we, as His ministers (i.e., “servants”), urge men, “Be ye reconciled to God” (vv. 19-20).

This wonderful “ministry of reconciliation” is outlined in 6:1-10, under three subcategories, totaling 28 characteristics. First, there is a tenfold *ministry of suffering*. “In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings” (vv. 4-5). On the other hand, it also encompasses a ninefold *ministry of godliness*: “By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left” (vv. 6-7).

These attributes of suffering, combined with the characteristics of godliness, produce what might be called the ninefold *paradox of the ministry*. “By honor and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (vv. 8-10).

The central paradox of these nine is the great central theme of the Christian life, centered in Christ: “As dying, and, behold, we live!” This is the ministry of reconciliation, for “they which live should . . . henceforth live . . . unto him which died for them, and rose again” (5:15). HMM

Tuesday, October 2

Holy Anointing

“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” (1 John 2:20)

The word “unction” in our text is translated “anointing” the other two times it is used (1 John 2:27). That term, and a companion word, are used only seven times in the New Testament, but all refer to the same essential concept often spoken of in the Old Testament.

Both things (tabernacle, temple, vessels, offerings) and people (priests, Levites, kings, ambassadors) were “anointed”—often ceremoniously—to identify them as consecrated or honored for a special service or position. Once anointed, the person or object was to be held in great respect by everyone.

Thus, we who are the “children of God” (Romans 8:16) have been anointed by God Himself (2 Corinthians 1:21) in such a way that the anointing abides, teaches, and is truth (1 John 2:27). This anointing is, obviously, no ceremonial oil demonstrating an honor (Psalm 133:2), but rather the “pouring out” of the Holy Spirit Himself onto and into our earthly bodies, consecrating us to be the very “temple” of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

This “unction” further designates us to be “kings and priests” (Revelation 1:6) who will one day “reign on earth” (Revelation 5:10). We are called “lively stones” (1 Peter 2:5) being built into a spiritual house for the Lord.

Furthermore, we are to be seen as “chaste virgin[s]” (2 Corinthians 11:2) who are ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), having been set apart as a “vessel unto honour” (2 Timothy 2:21) in the “household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). We are to know all these things. HMM III

Wednesday, October 3

The Vanishing Serpents

“For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods.” (Exodus 7:12)

Like the future image of the beast, which will seem to have life, these magician-induced serpents can only have been “lying wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Neither men nor demons can really create life; this is a prerogative of God alone, who “created every living creature” (Genesis 1:21). However, both human magicians and demons can generate hypnotic mental states and occult hallucinations that ungodly people like Pharaoh may be deceived into seeing as real physical entities. When their demonstration was over, however, nothing was left. Even their rods (not “serpents”) were gone, for Aaron’s genuine serpent had made a meal of them. In a true miracle of creation, Aaron’s God had transmuted the dead atoms of a wooden stick (just as He later made it to produce blossoms and almonds, Numbers 17:8) into a living serpent, capable of consuming other sticks that only appeared to be serpents.

The deception of the magicians was revealed when they were unable later to imitate Moses’ miracle of turning dust into lice throughout the land of Egypt (Exodus 8:18). Interestingly, many people believed for many centuries that similar phenomena—which they called “spontaneous generation”—occurred naturalistically, but this notion was scientifically demolished by Pasteur over a hundred years ago. Only the living God can create life!

The miracle of Aaron’s rod is also a parable. Aaron’s rod of life took on the nature of the serpent, just as Christ was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). But then it swallowed up the other serpent-rods, and the sting of “that old serpent” was put away. Thus, “death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). HMM

The Teacher

“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.” (2 Timothy 2:24)

Patience and gentleness are invaluable Christian virtues in any occupation. Teaching, however, involves other attributes as well, and these are effectively set forth by Paul in the second letter to young pastor Timothy. Consider just four of these important exhortations to God-called teachers.

Be straight. Sound doctrine is absolutely essential, the most vital criterion of all. “Hold fast the form of sound words. . . . Shun profane and vain babblings. . . . Preach the word . . . Exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. . . . Endure sound doctrine” (1:13; 2:16; 4:2-3). Straight doctrine is the basis of everything.

Be strong. One can, of course, be strong and gentle at the same time, and this is what God requires. “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1). A non-gracious Christian leader is a dis-grace to his calling.

Be studious. The Lord has given us His inspired Word, and a “sound mind” with which to study it, as well as “the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (1:7, 14) to illuminate it, and He expects us to be diligent in its use. “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2:15).

Be steadfast. As he concludes, Paul foresees the awful spiritual and moral conditions of the last days—surely enough to intimidate and discourage any Christian. “But,” he then says “*continue . . . in the things which thou hast learned*” (3:14). This exhortation is followed by the strongest passage on the full divine inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Scriptures to be found in the Bible. Regardless of circumstances, a Christian teacher must maintain sound doctrine, be both strong and gracious, be diligent in handling the Scriptures, and just “live there” in the Word of God. HMM

Friday, October 5

Reconciliation

“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)

It is interesting to note that as important as is the doctrine of the atonement in Christian theology, the word itself occurs only once in the King James New Testament. It is in the very next verse after our text. “And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (v. 11).

The Greek word is translated “reconciliation” in 2 Corinthians 5:18: “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” Thus, the doctrine of atonement is the doctrine of reconciliation. Men are separated from our holy God both by their sin nature and also by their actual guilt of committed sin. But through the substitutionary death of Christ for our sins, “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” That is, God has already reconciled sinners to Himself by the sacrificial death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem is that sinners are not actually reconciled to God until they personally accept this free gift of God’s love to them.

But we who “have now received the atonement [that is, reconciliation] . . . joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:11). A part of that joy should be in the fact that God has now “given unto us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Thus, it has become our great privilege to tell others that they can be completely forgiven and eternally saved. “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21). HMM

Abiding

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

There is nothing sophisticated or subtle about this Greek word, *meno*, used many times in the New Testament. The various shades of “remaining” or “staying” are easily understood from the context and always focus on a consistent and even permanent situation.

So it is in our text. The Christian is expected to “stay” in a relationship with the Lord Jesus—implying both a permanent relationship and a “normal” relationship. We are to abide in Christ so completely that we would be like a branch growing out of the vine—thus making “fruit” possible (John 15:4-5). We are to continue in His Word so thoroughly that our prayers will be in synchronization with His will (John 15:7) and our behavior will be in synchronization with His commandments (1 John 3:24).

The steadfast “dwelling” in Christ promises to produce a confidence in our eternal relationship—the word choice especially emphasizes freedom in speaking, an unreservedness in speech. As Peter freely spoke at Pentecost (Acts 2:29) and the disciples received boldness to speak the Word of God (Acts 4:31), so our “plainness of speech” (2 Corinthians 3:12) in witnessing sets the stage for our “boldness in the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17).

Ultimately, of course, the lifestyle of abiding *in* Christ while on this earth builds the sanctified relationship *with* Christ that we are to enjoy for eternity.

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:35-36). HMM III

Sunday, October 7

The Doctrines of Salvation

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

The great theme of “salvation” (Greek *soteria*, Hebrew *yeshua*) is prominent in both Old and New Testaments. It basically means “deliverance” and can be used for local and specific “deliverances” from perils, as well as for the eternal deliverance of one’s soul. In the latter sense, it is used for deliverance from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin in daily life, and from the very presence of sin in the future life.

Salvation, of course, is found only through the Lord Jesus Christ, whose very coming into the world was to “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The name Jesus means “salvation.” In fact, His name really was *Yeshua*, the word that often is translated “salvation” in the Old Testament. Devout Simeon, after waiting for many years, took the infant Jesus in his arms, exclaiming by the Spirit, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Luke 2:30).

The theme of salvation is “so great” (Hebrews 2:3), it embraces many major doctrines of Scripture. As a very sketchy summary, one may note that it includes the doctrines of *atonement* (Leviticus 17:11); of *substitution* (Isaiah 53:5); of *imputation* (Romans 4:6-8); *propitiation* (1 John 2:2); *redemption* (1 Peter 1:18); *remission* (Acts 10:43); *justification* (Romans 3:28); *adoption* (Ephesians 1:5); *reconciliation* (Romans 5:10-11); *regeneration* (Titus 3:5); *sanctification* (Hebrews 10:9-10); and *glorification* (Romans 8:30). When a person is saved, the blessings implied in every one of these great doctrines of salvation become his, whether Jew or Gentile, whether found in Old Testament prophecy or New Testament fulfillment. No wonder Paul was not ashamed of this great gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, and neither should we be! HMM

Monday, October 8

Scattered Abroad

“So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.” (Genesis 11:8)

The verse above is a summary statement of God’s judgment at Babel, at which time God confused the languages of the people there and dispersed them throughout the earth. These original nations—all descended from Noah and his three sons—are listed in what is called the “Table of Nations” in Genesis 10. As time went on, the people proliferated into still more nations and languages and migrated still farther from Babel until finally, as the verse says, they were scattered “upon the face of all the earth.”

Christopher Columbus was a brave explorer and skilled navigator, as well as a diligent Bible student and convinced Christian. However, he did not “discover America,” as he is said to have done on October 12 in 1492. Neither did Leif Ericsson or any other adventurer whose name has been suggested for this honor.

The Indians discovered America! Archaeologists have found Indian artifacts at occupation sites dating well before the time of Christ at many places in America. And wherever these early tribes went, they carried with them the pantheistic religion taught to their ancestors at Babel by Nimrod there in that first great city after the Flood.

Many centuries later, however, there was another great scattering with a much different purpose and motivation. “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). This time, it was not a false religion that was being carried with them but the saving gospel of Christ who had commanded His followers, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), even “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). HMM

Tuesday, October 9

I Will Build My Church

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:181)

This is the first of 115 occurrences of *ekklesia* in the New Testament—three times translated “assembly,” all other times as “church.” It is a compound of *ek* and *klesia*, thus meaning “called out” from their previous locations to meet together as a body for some purpose. The three times it is translated “assembly” refer to the town meeting in Ephesus (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Once it refers to the congregation of Israelites in the wilderness (Acts 7:38), leaving 111 times when it refers to a Christian church or churches.

Of these 111, at least 86 clearly refer to local churches, each meeting as a body in specific times and places. Individual local churches may come and go, but the institution of the local church will continue at least until the return of Christ. In the Bible’s final chapter, after outlining the entire future of the world, Jesus said, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches” (Revelation 22:16). All churches of all times and places, as well as the seven representative churches of Asia (Revelation 2 and 3), which have long since died out as distinct local churches, are thus intended to hear of the world’s prophetic future.

This is the last mention of churches, but the first, as cited in our text, has eternal dimensions, for even the “gates of hell” cannot prevail against it. This church actually will be in heaven itself. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22-23). HMM

Wednesday, October 10

Teaching Universe

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1-2)

This familiar psalm, extolling God’s creation (vv. 1-6) and God’s Word (vv. 7-14), begins with a beautiful summary of the testimony of the physical universe. “The heavens” and the “firmament” are synonymous (Genesis 1:8), both being equivalent to our modern scientific concept of space. The “glory of God” refers to His infinite power, or energy, and “his handywork” implies the infinite variety and complexity of physical systems, or matter, in the universe. This interaction of matter and energy occurs everywhere throughout space, but also has to operate and be understood in the context of time, “day unto day” and “night unto night.”

The entire marvelous complex of space/time/matter/energy is continually “uttering speech” and “showing knowledge,” teaching men and women of all times and places that there is a great Creator God who made it all. “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen” (Romans 1:20).

The boundless space, the endless time, the infinite energies, and the innumerable complexities of the matter of the universe all unite in irrefutable testimony to the God of creation. The most fundamental principle of science, as well as the most universal rule of human experience, is the Law of Cause and Effect, stating that no effect can transcend its cause. Thus, the great cause of the universe must be infinite, eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient. And since we as living, feeling persons are able to think about all this, that cause must also be a living, feeling, thinking person. This is the great lesson engraved on the textbook of the universe for all to read and learn. The whole creation, indeed, declares the glory of God. HMM

Thursday, October 11

Seven Outgrowths of Faith

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.” (2 Peter 1:5-7)

“Having escaped the corruption that is in the world” (v. 4) through our “faith” in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we must now grow spiritually, conforming our nature and practice to His. We must put to use the divine nature we now possess, recognizing that He has provided all the resources we need.

In this passage, Peter assumes we already have “faith,” thus here our spiritual lives must begin. Peter instructs us to “add to” that faith seven character traits: virtue, knowledge, temperance (self-control), patience (perseverance), godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (*agape* love).

There seems to be, both in the text (i.e., “add to”) and in practice, a progression here. New Christians should strive for *virtue*, eliminating sinful actions and thoughts from our lives, as the Holy Spirit brings conviction. A commitment to growth in *knowledge*, first the basics of the faith and then deeper doctrines, enables us to exercise wisdom in life’s choices. A *self-controlled*, disciplined lifestyle exercises *perseverance*, even strength in the face of adversity, which in turn produces *godliness*—an attitude of reverence toward God that strives to please Him by developing His attitudes and priorities. Our relations with others will thus be marked by *brotherly kindness* toward believers and *agape love* (self-sacrificing, undeserved love) for all.

Such spiritual growth does not come without effort. He has provided all we need, but we must “give all diligence” to the process, much more than simply allowing the Holy Spirit to reside in our hearts to work on our character and habits. Any lack of spiritual growth is *our* fault, not His. JDM

Friday, October 12

The Whole Armor of God

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” (Ephesians 6:13)

This modern age of terrorism, drugs, sexual license, rampant crime, and worldwide unbelief is surely an evil day; and each Christian urgently needs “the whole armour of God” to stand against the devil’s wiles today. This armor is clearly described in Ephesians 6:14-18, but it seems that Satan’s wiles have confused it in the minds of many Christian educators. Paraphrasing this passage, their view might be expressed somewhat as follows: “Gird your loins with an open-ended search for truth, and have on the breastplate of value sensitivity, your feet shod with the gospel of academic tolerance; above all, taking the shield of accreditation and legal protection, with the helmet of economic security and the sword of evolutionary thought, praying always to the Department of Education and your academic peers.” Such Christian compromise is no armor at all.

How much better to be undergirded with revealed truth, founded on creation and biblical inerrancy, than by a “search” for truth! The true breastplate is righteousness, both imputed and practiced, and the true peace of God through Christ adorns the beautiful feet of those who carry the gospel. The shield is faith, which must be exercised first of all in special creation (Hebrews 11:3). The helmet, protecting the mind, is the genuine hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8). With no armor for the back, since the Christian is “to stand,” not to retreat, the chief offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God that meets each particular need. Finally, insistent prayer is both an offensive and a defensive weapon. The “weapons of our warfare” are “mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). HMM

Saturday, October 13

Overcoming Victory

“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 power behind our overcoming victory is none other than the presence of the Holy Spirit of God who indwells the twice-born (1 John 4:4) because of “our faith.”

Much has been recorded by the apostle John about the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came in the flesh to lay down His life as the propitiation for our sins. The completion of His work in us will be realized at His coming: “When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

These great truths are the foundational anchor that keeps our faith strong and our hope secure in Christ. Yet there is much more to come.

- We will “eat of the tree of life” (Revelation 2:7).
- We will “not be hurt of the second death” (Revelation 2:11).
- We will be given “a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Revelation 2:17).
- We will have “power over the nations” (Revelation 2:26).
- We will “be clothed in white raiment” and confessed before the heavenly Father and His angels (Revelation 3:5).
- We will be made “a pillar in the temple” of God, and “shall go no more out” (Revelation 3:12).
- We will be granted “to sit” with the Lord Jesus on His throne (Revelation 3:21).
- We will “inherit all things” (Revelation 21:7).

Is it any wonder that John spoke of our “victory” that awaits us when we have “overcome” the world? May God grant us the steadfast faith to “occupy” until He comes (Luke 19:13). HMM III

The Lord

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”
(2 Timothy 2:19)

The title “Lord,” when applied to Christ, is not merely a title of respect but an acknowledgment of relationship. We belong to Him, just as bondservants (slaves) belong to their owners. He owns us, having bought (i.e., “redeemed”) us with His blood, and the distinguishing seal of His purchase is that His servants are expected to “depart from iniquity.”

Thus, whenever “Lord” is attached to His name, there is an implied confession of His Lordship in that particular area of life. For example, to be saved, one must “confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus” (i.e., “Jesus as Lord”) and “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 10:9; Acts 16:31). Following that, we are commanded: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6).

Even in the mundane affairs of life, He is our Lord. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13); “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11). Obedience to the Lordship of Christ is, of course, absolutely essential for a truly Christian and happy family. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. . . . Husbands, love your wives, . . . even as the Lord the church. . . . Children, obey your parents in the Lord. . . . And, ye fathers . . . bring [your children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22, 25, 29; 6:1, 4).

As our text reminds us, Christ’s Lordship implies holiness and full submission to Him. “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh. . . . For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord” (Romans 13:14; 14:8). HMM

Monday, October 15

The Throne of David

*“And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”
(2 Samuel 7:16)*

No other ordinary human being, not even the greatest of men, was ever given a promise like this promise to David. It can be understood, however, when one realizes that David is a type of Christ and that, in terms of His human genealogy, Christ did indeed inherit the right to David’s throne. As the angel Gabriel told Mary: “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever” (Luke 1:32-33). The coming Messiah is identified as this promised Son of David in the Old Testament prophecies (e.g., Isaiah 9:6-7).

Without attempting to discuss the eschatological implications of these great prophecies, it is remarkable just to note the striking typological relation of David to Christ (and, correspondingly, of Saul to Adam). Saul, like Adam, had a wonderful physique and every natural advantage; he was given dominion over a new order of things under God; he received God’s Spirit and his seed would have reigned forever had he not failed by intruding into a forbidden sphere; he was then rejected by God because of his disobedience, and finally the Spirit of God departed from him.

David, however, is a beautiful type of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. Though anointed, he was not accepted by his brethren; he was a shepherd and performed great services for his people before becoming king, but he was rejected and condemned to death. God delivered him, but even then he was only accepted by a few, until suddenly all Israel accepted him and he was promised an eternal kingdom. Christ now claims: “I am the root and the offspring of David”—both Creator and heir of David—“and the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). HMM

Tuesday, October 16

Water and Blood

“This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.” (1 John 5:6)

John’s writings are replete with examples and illustrations that focus on the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel of John is built around seven great miracles of creation demonstrating the unique power that only the omnipotent Creator God could wield (John 10:25).

In his first epistle, John uses the word “know” 28 times to emphasize the behaviors and evidence that assure us that we have a living faith in Jesus Christ and are in truth the sons of God. In today’s text, John lists three “proofs” witnessed in history that verify the incarnation of the God-man Jesus Christ.

The water refers to physical birth—the amniotic sac that surrounds and cushions every human child until just before birth. This common experience was used by the Lord Jesus to help Nicodemus understand the necessity of the second (spiritual) birth required to enter the Kingdom of heaven (John 3:5-6).

The blood is either a reference to Christ’s death on Calvary “for the remission of sins” (Romans 3:25), or, perhaps, the fulfillment of the many prophecies that this Messiah would be of the lineage of David (Luke 1:32). Either way, this poignant evidence was both visible and verifiable.

The “Spirit” witness is obviously the time when the Holy Spirit visibly descended like a dove on the Lord Jesus at His baptism by John the Baptist, and the voice of the heavenly Father said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (John 1:33; Matthew 3:16-17).

There is thus a threefold witness to Christ’s incarnation: human physical birth, royal bloodline with the shedding of innocent blood, and heavenly confirmation. “This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). HMM III

Wednesday, October 17

The Valley of Blessing

“And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day.” (2 Chronicles 20:26)

The name Berachah means “blessing,” and the people of Judah surely had much reason to bless the Lord. The armies of the Moabites and Ammonites, and many others, had invaded their land, and King Jehoshaphat had no forces sufficient to oppose them.

But Jehoshaphat had already led his people back to the Lord, and now he prayed for their deliverance, acknowledging that the Lord was “God in heaven . . . so that none is able to withstand thee.” Therefore God replied, through the prophet Jahaziel, that “the battle is not yours, but God’s . . . stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 20:6, 15, 17). God then set the invading armies against each other until all were slain, and God’s people were delivered without even lifting a sword. No wonder the people “blessed the LORD”!

The Hebrew word *berachah* (“blessing”) is used some 68 times in the Old Testament, the first being God’s promise to Abraham when he followed the Lord: “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2). God’s promise to Abraham has been abundantly kept, though there is much more to come. We, like the people in the valley of Berachah, have much for which to bless the Lord, for we also have seen the salvation of God: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

Therefore, “bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Psalm 103:1). HMM

Thursday, October 18

God's Final Word

“The LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.” (Zechariah 14:9)

God cannot be defeated in His creative purpose for this earth and its people. In the beginning, there was only God. In the ending, there will be one Lord, and His name one.

In the meantime, He is working out His great plan of reconciliation, as revealed in His Word. In the magnificent book of Revelation, especially the last two chapters, we are carried forward in the Spirit into the never-ending glories of the renewed earth, with the great Creator and Redeemer dwelling there with His people eternally.

But in that final chapter, there are some final words from the Lord to guide and warn us until He returns. There is one final invitation, for example: “And let him that is athirst come” (Revelation 22:17). Then there is a final warning. This completed book of Scripture contains all that man will ever need to know concerning salvation, the Christian life, and God’s great plans, so let no man “add unto these things,” or “take away from the words of the book of this prophecy” (vv. 18-19). There is no salvation, except through His Word.

Next, there is a final promise. “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly” (v. 20). Of all the promises of God, there is none more “exceeding great and precious” than this (2 Peter 1:4). In response, there is a final prayer, teaching us that this should be the climax of every believing prayer: “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (v. 20). This is our greatest need!

Lastly, there is a final benediction, the same as the close of each of Paul’s epistles, and the most wonderful of all the words of a holy, yet loving, Creator, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (v. 21). It is fitting that God’s Word, which began with His creation, should end with His saving grace! HMM

Friday, October 19

The End

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17)

As Peter wrote his first epistle, foremost in his mind was a desire to encourage the believers to stand firm in the face of suffering and trial. On four occasions he used the term “the end,” focusing his readers’ attention on the final resolution of all things. A study of these occurrences gives us a glimpse of the tenor of the entire book.

The first use followed an explanation of the nature and benefits of the various trials in a believer’s life. The result would be a pure, effective faith now, as well as “receiving *the end* of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1:9), the final ultimate deliverance of our whole person.

Meanwhile, “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to *the end* for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13). Our minds should be completely (“to the end”) ready for action, sober and expectant, focused on the ultimate resolution of all trials.

This ultimate resolution could come at any time: “*The end* of all things is at hand” (4:7). Our responses should be to “be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” To be sober is to be of sound judgment, making careful decisions, not based on emotion; especially watchful as we pray, with eternity in mind.

Our text gives us the last occurrence of “the end.” The time of final judgment on both Christian and non-Christian looms nearer and nearer. But God’s cleansing of His people has already begun, and it at times is not pleasant, although beneficial. His judgment on those outside “the house of God” will be much more severe, with no opportunity for reconciliation. This warning should motivate us in our ministry to the unsaved. JDM

Saturday, October 20

The Father of Lights

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:1)

God, Himself, is both author and finisher of everything we have that is good. This, of course, is the testimony concerning His creation in the beginning, which was both “very good” and “finished” (Genesis 1:31; 2:1). The unique name “Father of lights” seems to suggest a remarkable scientific insight. Since light is the most basic form of energy, and yet is equivalent also to all other forms, and since literally *everything* in the physical universe is energy in *some* form, it is singularly appropriate to speak of the totality of all God’s good and perfect gifts in creation as “lights.” And, since all these energies are not now being created (only “conserved”), their original source can only be from the *Father* of lights!

There even seems to be a hint of both of the great laws of science, energy conservation as well as energy deterioration. The term “variableness,” used only here, means literally “transmutation.” Just as God is immutable, the total amount of His created “lights” is conserved—neither created nor destroyed. The Second Law states that, in all energy conversions (that is, in everything that happens), the entropy of the universe increases. “Entropy” means “in-turning,” coming from two Greek words, *en* and *trope*—the second of which is used in this verse. Entropy is a measure of disorganization, and its inexorable increase is a result of God’s curse on the creation following man’s rebellion. Thus, although the total energy of the universe is conserved (by the First Law), the available energy is decreasing (by the Second Law). Nevertheless, God Himself is not bound by this law that He has imposed, for a time, on His creation. With Him is not even a “shadow” of any “turning” (*trope*). God never changes, and His purposes can never be defeated! HMM

Sunday, October 21

The Vine

“What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” (Isaiah 5:4)

In Scripture we find many references to vines and vineyards, but there are three major passages that together reveal three aspects concerning the character of God and His love for His people.

The first, Isaiah 5:1-7, includes our text. Here we find that God, the owner, planter, and caretaker of the vineyard, cannot contain His disappointment, for despite the loving care showered upon the vine, it has brought forth improper, worthless fruit. In this parable, “the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant” (v. 7), the chosen people who had seen more clearly than anyone else His abundant provision, but who had chosen to reject Him and not bear Him fruit. To them, and to those of us who reject His cultivating grace, He says: “I will lay it waste” (v. 6).

Psalms 80:8-19 gives us a picture of the abject desolation of the unfruitful vineyard once it is abandoned by the vinedresser. It is ravaged by enemies, wild animals, and fire, utterly helpless. The “vine” (Israel) may cry for help and restoration, but there are consequences to be paid. What a graphic picture this is, and what a reminder to believers today that we cannot for long ignore His will for our lives.

The last and most precious passage is found in John 15:1-16 and concerns fruitbearing. “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (v. 5). Here are found the secrets of the believer’s growth and fertility in glorious union with Christ. “Herein is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (v. 8). JDM

Monday, October 22

Carest Thou Not?

“And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38)

There are times when we have great problems and God seems to ignore our prayers, and finally we begin to wonder if He cares about us at all. There is no need to wonder. God cares about the sparrow, and He surely cares about His own dear children. If there is not some clear reason why He fails to answer (such as sin in our lives), then perhaps it is simply (as in Job’s case) a test of our faith.

When the disciples thought Jesus didn’t care, He rebuked them thus: “Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” (Mark 4:40). Mary and Martha sent word that their brother Lazarus was deathly ill, but then Jesus “abode two days still in the same place where he was” (John 11:6). When the sisters complained about His delay, He replied: “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).

One day a woman of Canaan cried out to Him for mercy on her for her demon-possessed daughter, “but he answered her not a word.” He seemed not to care, but she kept calling on Him and worshipping Him, until He finally said unto her: “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Matthew 15:23, 28).

The disciples and the sisters of Lazarus and the Canaanite woman all wondered at His seeming lack of concern, but He did care. He finally calmed the storm, and raised Lazarus, and healed the daughter. His delay was in order to test and strengthen their faith.

Can He not also test us, “that the trial of your faith . . . though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7)? HMM

Tuesday, October 23

Confident Prayer

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

This is the classic conditional promise. Confidence in prayer is tied directly to the qualifier: “*If* we ask anything according to his will. . . .” It is, therefore, important that we understand “what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17).

Many surveys have verified that most people pray. All of those studies, however, note that a good portion of the prayers are directed toward an unknown “higher power.” It may seem obvious, but the first requirement for coming under the will of God is to “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 3:23). Before God will respond to our “petitions,” we must be “born again” (John 3:3).

Jesus was once asked what the greatest command was. His response, quoting from Deuteronomy 6, was: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). That internal and invisible love of the heart is expressed by obedience to the commandments that God has given. John records it this way: “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

Thus, a simple formula appears. If we obey what God has commanded us (starting with faith in the saving work of Christ), then we are assured that God will hear us when we pray. Once our confidence is secured, we can know that God will respond to what we desired from Him. The psalmist states the formula this way: “Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psalm 37:4).
HMM III

Wednesday, October 24

Jephthah's Daughter

“Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.” (Judges 11:31)

The story of Jephthah has been a stumbling block to many who interpret it as teaching that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter to God as a burnt offering. As he prepared to face the Ammonite armies, he made the vow recorded in our text, if God would only give him the victory. His only child, a beloved daughter, was then first to meet him at his return, and so it was she who had to be offered.

It should be remembered, however, that Jephthah was a man of true faith (Hebrews 11:32-33), and he would never have vowed to disobey God's prohibition against human sacrifice. The problem is that the Hebrew conjunction *waw* (translated “and” in our text) is very flexible in meaning depending on context. Here, “or” is better than “and.”

That is, Jephthah vowed that whatever first came out to meet him would be dedicated to the Lord: If a person came out (Jephthah was probably thinking of a servant), he or she would be dedicated to God's service at the tabernacle, as Hannah later dedicated Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11). Or if an animal from his flock came out, it would be sacrificed.

His daughter, out of love for her father and gratitude to God for His deliverance from the Ammonites, insisted her father keep his vow. Since that meant that she, as a perpetual servant at the tabernacle, could never have a husband and children, she “bewailed her virginity” (not her impending death) and then “returned to her father” so that he could keep his vow, and throughout her life “she knew no man” (Judges 11:38-39). Instead of a strange tale of human sacrifice, this is the story of the love of a God-fearing father and daughter for each other and for their Lord. HMM

Thursday, October 25

Deadly Sin

“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.” (1 John 5:16)

Many pastors and other godly leaders have been asked about this verse. Usually, the question is asked from a very personal perspective: “Have I committed this kind of sin?”

This reference does not seem to apply to the famous “unforgivable sin” (Matthew 12:31), since that sin is the final rejection of God’s truth transmitted to all humanity by the Holy Spirit (John 3:19; 16:7-11). In the context of today’s text, John is clearly writing and warning believers that it is possible to commit a sin that is worthy of physical death—a sin so obvious to others that the brethren are not told to “pray for it.”

There are a few such examples in the Scripture.

- The sons of Eli dishonoring the priesthood (1 Samuel 2)
- Korah’s rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16)
- Ananias and Sapphira lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5)
- An incestuous church member delivered over to Satan for his destruction (1 Corinthians 5)
- Those who have known the “good things” of God but have withdrawn after having “tasted” them (Hebrews 6:4-6)
- Willful sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth (Hebrews 10:26)
- Returning again to bondage after knowing the freedom in Christ (2 Peter 2:20-22)

All sin produces “death” (James 1:15), and all of us will die because of sin (Genesis 3:19; Hebrews 9:27). But this deadly sin brings about the premature “execution” of a believer when he or she consciously refuses to follow known righteousness and instead chooses open ungodliness. May it never be so among us. HMM III

Friday, October 26

Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.” (Luke 6:22)

“Blessed” means “happy,” and it would seem paradoxical to try to find happiness by being persecuted. Most Christians are extremely reluctant to do anything that might make them less popular with their peers, let alone anything that might lead to social ostracism or even physical suffering. Yet, Jesus said that this is the way to find true happiness.

He did not say that blessing comes through suffering for foolishness’ sake, or for carelessness’ sake, or for sinfulness’ sake. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Matthew 5:10). The principle is amplified by Peter: “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye. . . . But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:14-16).

It hurts, of course, to be “cast out—as evil” when one is sincerely seeking to do right and to honor God. This was the experience of the blind man to whom Jesus gave sight. The religious authorities responded to his testimony with: “Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out” (John 9:34). Nevertheless, he now could see! Likewise, the religious leaders “raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.” Nevertheless, “the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 13:50, 52).

The situation exists today in many countries—soon perhaps in America. If so, may the Lord enable us to honor His name in suffering with joy and without compromise, for “Christ also suffered for us” (1 Peter 2:21). HMM

Saturday, October 27

Knowing Him

“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20)

John uses two words for “know” in this short letter, both of which are used in the final instruction to his readers. The Greek word *ginosko* is used 25 times throughout this epistle, stressing knowledge that is gained through personal experience. The other word, *ei'do* (or *oi'da*), is used an additional 17 times, emphasizing mental understanding and comprehension.

The Intellectual Confidence

We “know [*ei'do*] that he was manifested to take away our sins” (1 John 3:5). We “know that we have passed from death unto life” (1 John 3:14). We “know that [we] have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). We “know that we are of God” (1 John 5:19). We “know that the Son of God is come” (1 John 5:20). All of this “head knowledge” is, of course, straight from the Word of God. These are the basics of our belief in the work of Christ.

The Personal Experience

We “know [*ginosko*] that we know [*ginosko*] him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). “There [are] many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time” (1 John 2:18). “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2).

Thus, our intellectual “knowledge” of God’s Word is “experienced” as we “work out [our] own salvation” (Philippians 2:12). Being “born again” is just the beginning. We should “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). HMM III

Sunday, October 28

Satan's Strategic Plan

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:3)

The magnificent book of Genesis sets the foundation for Scripture, revealing the “Roman numerals” upon which the rest of the Bible’s message is built. Apart from the actual events of the creation week, the fall of Adam and Eve, and the subsequent horrific growth of sin and the awful judgment of the Flood, the gospel message would make little sense.

Paul’s warning showcases the importance of Satan’s strategy to ensnare humanity in the same trap. The Devil’s tactics change with time and culture, but the strategy remains the same.

First, Satan always attempts to make us *doubt* the Word of God (Genesis 3:1). If we question the accuracy, the meaning, the authenticity, the historicity, or any other shade of “all scripture” (2 Timothy 3:16), then we begin edging onto a slippery slope that will only lead to the next stage.

Second, Satan always confronts the doubter with a *denial* of the Word of God (Genesis 3:4). When one begins to deny the authority, the capability, or the will of God to carry out His Word, the slide into the final phase is inevitable.

Third, Satan ultimately heaps *denigration* on the Person of God Himself (Genesis 3:5). Once one embraces the thought that the Word of God is not trustworthy and that God either will not or cannot do what He says, it absolutely follows that God is either a liar, a hypocrite, or a capricious and whimsical ogre.

May God protect us from the “wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). HMM III

Monday, October 29

Prayer for All Men

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.”
(1 Timothy 2:1)

The book of 1 Timothy consists of various charges (1:18-19) to Paul’s disciple Timothy. The first charge (2:1-8) concerns prayer in the church. The fact that Paul mentions it “first of all” (v. 1) indicates that he felt it of primary importance. Note the four types of prayer in our text verse.

Supplications, or perhaps *petitions*, referring to one’s personal needs: We must recognize our continued dependence on God’s provision. “The effectual fervent prayer [same word] of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Prayers: This is a general term with a number of applications, but foremost it indicates reverence for and worship of the one to whom the prayers are offered. “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8).

Intercessions: This word implies a personal bequest on an intimate basis, as child to father. The only other occurrence of the word regards the eating of food that “is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:5).

Giving of thanks: When we give thanks, we recognize that our blessings are undeserved. “Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever” (Revelation 7:12).

These types of prayers, which should probably be understood as representing all types of prayers, should be made “for all men,” specifically those in authority (v. 2) and for the unsaved (v. 4). Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will present our prayers to the Father (v. 5) and ensure that He will answer them as He sees best. JDM

Tuesday, October 30

Man's Grief and God's Compassion

“For the LORD will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.” (Lamentations 3:31-33)

The five chapters of the unique book of Lamentations, written by Jeremiah in his grief over the destruction of Jerusalem, are all written as acrostics, with each verse of each chapter beginning with successive letters of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet. That is, verse 1 of each chapter begins with the letter *aleph*, verse 2 with *beth*, etc. (like A, B, etc. in English). The middle chapter is written in acrostic triplets (the first three verses beginning with *aleph*, and so on). Thus, chapter 3 contains 66 verses instead of 22.

The three verses of our text are right at the midpoint of this middle chapter, comprising the final triplet of the first half of the book, and thus uniquely constituting its central theme. As such, it could well also be the heart cry of every saint in any age experiencing God's chastening hand.

Although Jeremiah himself had not sinned, his nation had grievously sinned, and thus all Israel had finally come under the rod. Nevertheless, the prophet could assure his people that God still loved them and would renew His compassion even in the midst of their grief. God does not willingly send affliction, for He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

When we suffer, or our nation suffers (as it surely will if it continues its present rebellion against God), it is well to remember His promise. “He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever” (Psalm 103:9). It is true that “no chastening 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

Wednesday, October 31

The Just Shall Live by Faith

“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.” (Habakkuk 2:4)

This great principle—“the just shall live by faith”—was the Scripture that so inflamed the soul of Martin Luther that it became the watchword of the Reformation. It occurs first here in the small prophecy of Habakkuk, but is then quoted three times in the New Testament. The term “just,” of course, means “justified” or “righteous.” God says a person is enabled to live righteously by his faith.

The nature of this faith is clarified by three quotations. The first is Romans 1:17: “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” The phrase “from faith to faith” means “from the beginning of faith to the end of faith,” and the context indicates that the foundational item of faith is faith in “his eternal power and Godhead,” which “from the creation of the world are clearly seen” (Romans 1:20).

Similarly, in the last occurrence: “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38). Then the writer notes that the basic item of faith is special creation: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3).

The middle occurrence is Galatians 3:11: “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.” Paul’s lengthy explanation to the Galatian legalists begins with Galatians 2:16: “Even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.” Thus, justifying, saving, living faith begins and centers in Jesus Christ, first as Creator of all things, then as the Savior who “hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13). HMM



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Thursday, November 1

An Ear to the Master's Voice

“And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.”
(Exodus 21:5-6)

This unique ordinance of the Mosaic law is significant as being the first one given after the Ten Commandments. It (and the following ordinances) centers first on the most humble members of society (that is, the slave—recognizing the universal existence of slavery at the time and ameliorating its practice), then on other people, then on property—thus establishing God's priorities.

Here also, right at the beginning of the dispensation of law, we are given a picture in miniature of the coming Servant of the Lord, who would come someday to bear the penalty of the law for us, saving us by His grace.

The servant pictured here, with full right to be set free in the sabbatical year, chooses rather to do the will of his master forever, listening to his voice only—this commitment symbolized and sealed by the opening in his ear. Just so, the coming Savior would say: “Mine ears hast thou opened. . . . Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:6-8). The fulfillment of this prophecy is described in Hebrews 10:5-10. There, the opening of the ear of the servant is interpreted as the preparation of His human body “to do thy will, O God. . . . By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:7, 10). Out of love for the Father and for those who would share the Father's house with Him, He offered His body to accomplish the saving will of God. HMM

Dark Waters and Thick Clouds

“And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind. And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies.”
(2 Samuel 22:11-12)

This mysterious passage in David’s song of deliverance (also in Psalm 18) is usually classified by commentators as mere poetic hyperbole. However, it may also be taken literally, if we only assume that David was translated by the Holy Spirit (who “spake by me”—2 Samuel 23:2) far back in time to the great Flood, seeing in vision the Lord in great power unleashing the mighty waters of judgment on a corrupt world, yet delivering Noah through it all. David had a similar vision when he wrote Psalm 29, which speaks explicitly of the Noahic Flood (Hebrew *mabbul*, v. 10).

In our text above, the Hebrew word for “wind” is the same as “spirit,” so this phrase could refer to “the wings of the Spirit.” In the Bible’s first reference to “the Spirit of God” (Genesis 1:2), He is seen as “moving” in the presence of the primeval waters, the word being the same as that for the fluttering movement of the wings of a great bird. This vibrating motion implies the generating of mighty waves of energy flowing out from the Spirit to energize the newly created cosmos of Genesis 1:1. Similarly, the divine energy emanates again from the Spirit here at the Flood, but this time in destructive rather than creative power.

The references to waters and darkness in these and nearby verses may well refer to the condensation and precipitation of the extensive canopy suggested by the “waters which were above the firmament” (Genesis 1:7), when great torrents of rain suddenly poured through “the sluiceways of heaven,” continuing at highest intensity for 40 days, then at lesser intensity for 110 more days, until the “thick clouds” were emptied and the great Flood covered the whole earth. HMM

Saturday, November 3

The Truth

“... God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

The verses preceding our text encourage believers to be in prayer “for all men” (v. 1), including “all that are in authority” (v. 2), that our own lives might be “quiet and peaceable,” as well as for their salvation.

God, who abhors and promises to judge sinful individuals, does not desire to punish anyone. His desire is for “all men to be saved,” and He has done all that is necessary to bring this about, by paying sin’s awful penalty of death. While not all will avail themselves of this opportunity, choosing instead to continue in their sin, our prayers somehow are used by God to bring some “to the knowledge of the truth.”

The truth necessary for salvation follows: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all” (vv. 5-6).

In order to be saved, we must embrace the fact that there is only “one God” who alone holds the key to eternity, and that there is only one way by which we can reach that God, “the man Christ Jesus.” We, in our natural state, are at war with God, estranged from Him, and separated by the presence of sin in our lives. Christ Jesus, acting as our mediator, our peacemaker, our advocate, being both fully God (i.e., “one God”) and fully man (i.e., “the man”) bridges the gap between the Father and all men. As Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6).

How has He bridged the gap? He “gave himself a ransom for all” (v. 6). The Bible teaches that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) but that “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Since He willingly “gave himself” as a punishment for our sins, we can stand before God the Father in Christ’s sinlessness. JDM

Sanctified, Preserved, Called

“Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” (Jude 1:1)

Although the Scriptures have much to teach about each of these precious terms, Jude is the only New Testament writer to use them together in sequence. This is also the only passage that identifies specific roles for the Persons of the Trinity in the lives of believers.

God the Father is said to “sanctify” us (separate, consecrate), but He apparently does this through the Holy Spirit based on the Father’s foreknowledge (1 Peter 1:2). We are not told all that is involved, but our sanctification does include our “belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13) and the “offering of the body of Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 10:10), who “was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20).

Jesus Christ “preserves” us. The common use of this term in the New Testament is to “guard” or “watch” over something or someone. The believer is most often the subject of this verb—e.g., we are to “guard” our obedience to the instructions of God (1 Timothy 6:14; 1 John 2:3). Jude’s use, however, highlights the special attention our Lord gives to each of us so that our “whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The sanctification and the preservation come with the “calling,” the invitation that is issued from God to those who are “the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). It is a “high calling” (Philippians 3:14) and a “holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9), and once we are “called,” God will “justify” and “glorify” (Romans 8:30). The twice-born of God are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that [we] should shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). HMM III

Monday, November 5

Lord of Hosts

“And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there.”
(1 Samuel 1:3)

This majestic name of God, “LORD of hosts” (Hebrew *Jehovah Sabaoth*), occurs almost 240 times in the Bible, first of all in our text above. It is noteworthy that Elkanah, the father of Samuel, understood this name of God better than did the wicked priests, the two sons of Eli. The name occurs only once in the New Testament, speaking of oppressed laborers crying to “the Lord of sabaoth” (James 5:4).

A similar name, “God of hosts,” occurs nine times, the first in Psalm 80:7: “Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.” The combined name “LORD God of hosts” is used about 25 times, first in 2 Samuel 5:10: “And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.”

In all these 270 or so references, the name is used to emphasize the mighty power of God and His great host of angels “that excel in strength, that do his commandments” (Psalm 103:20). Not only is God Himself omnipotent and omniscient (after all, He is the Creator of all things!), but He has “an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22) at His call. Occasionally, some of these mighty hosts have actually been seen by men, as in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 6:17) and at the birth of Christ (Luke 2:13).

There is evidently an angelic hierarchy among these heavenly hosts. There are the cherubim and seraphim (Genesis 3:24; Isaiah 6:2), for example, as well as “Michael the archangel” (Jude 1:9) and “Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God” (Luke 1:19). However, the great “captain of the host of the LORD” (Joshua 5:14) is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He, and He alone, is the true “LORD of hosts.” HMM

Tuesday, November 6

Rest with Us

“Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

The Christians in the young church at Thessalonica, very soon after accepting Christ, underwent severe “persecutions and tribulations” (v. 4). The apostle Paul wrote to commend them that God had thus judged them to be “counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” (v. 5). That is, the kingdom of God was being persecuted when they were persecuted, and God would certainly repay their tormentors in kind. The believers’ tribulations were from men. Those who were being troubled would receive “rest with us” from God (“rest” here is a noun, not a verb).

The Thessalonians must realize, however, that this righteous recompense—at least in its full measure—must await the return of the Lord Jesus. They must resist the temptation to repay their persecutors in kind if the opportunity should come. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). They must simply continue to “endure” and “suffer,” so that “our God would count you worthy of this calling, and . . . That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you” (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 11-12).

The Lord Jesus Himself is our example, “that ye should follow his steps: . . . Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:21, 23).

“In the last days . . . all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:1, 12), and latter-day Christians may very well have opportunity to put this ancient counsel to the Thessalonians into present practice. If so, may God give us the grace to endure as they endured! HMM

Wednesday, November 7

The Common Salvation

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation . . .” (Jude 1:3)

The description of our salvation as “common” does not mean that salvation is “ordinary” or “normal” but rather that salvation is available to anyone who wants it. The term is translated “unclean” several times in passages that speak of items that are accessible to everyone rather than specialized foods or ceremonies available to just a few (Acts 11:8; Romans 14:14; etc.).

Right after Pentecost, the Jerusalem church experienced a quick growth in converts, many of whom were poor and needed practical help. The bond of the new church was so strong that “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32). That is the sense in which Jude speaks of a “common” salvation.

The salvation is available to all. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). None are excluded from the possibility of salvation—except those who refuse to believe what God has provided through the substitutionary death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 2:2).

But this salvation is also necessary for all. “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). It has become popular today to couch the gospel message in moderate terms, making the message appear optional or a “personal” belief system. No, it is the only salvation, even if it is “common.” “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). HMM III

Thursday, November 8

Author of Peace

“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Although these words were written with respect to church order, they express a general principle. “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated. . . . And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:15-18).

Our world and our natural lives seem perpetually in confusion, turmoil, and strife, and the source is the evil one—“the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The only one who can bring true peace is the Author of peace.

This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, for only “he is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14). He is the Author of peace, just as the devil is the author of all confusion and strife. Note the other titles of our great Author of peace.

He is called “the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus” (Hebrews 13:20). He is also “The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Melchizedek, who was at least a type of Christ, if not an actual pre-incarnate theophany of Christ Himself, is called “King of Salem, which is, King of peace” (Hebrews 7:2). In 2 Thessalonians 3:16, He is “the Lord of peace.”

He is the Author of peace, the Lord of peace, the Prince of peace, the King of peace, the very God of peace! He *is* our peace! Someday, “he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth” (Zechariah 9:10). In that day, “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20), and “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:7). HMM

Friday, November 9

Exalting the Anointed One

“The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.” (1 Samuel 2:10)

This is a remarkable prayer, uttered under divine inspiration by Hannah, thanking God for the miraculous birth of Samuel. It contains the first explicit reference in the Bible to the Messiah (“anointed,” in the Hebrew, is *Messiah*, equivalent to the Greek “Christ”). Hannah’s prophetic prayer predicts the ultimate exaltation of Messiah over all the adversaries of the Lord to the very ends of the earth.

Hannah also prophesied the coming of the Lord’s great King. Yet this was during the time of the judges, long before the people of Israel even began to request a king.

In fact, the entire prophecy is the first of many similar prophecies throughout the Bible that look forward to the return of the Lord “out of heaven” to judge all nations, to destroy His enemies, and to establish His anointed one as King of the earth.

There is nothing comparable to this prophecy in the earlier books of the Bible, but it is a theme often emphasized in the psalms and in the books of prophecy, as well as in the New Testament. For example, note David’s great prophecy: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed. . . . Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath. . . . Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. . . . and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (Psalm 2:2, 5-6, 8).

There are many similar later prophecies, but it is significant that the first one also contains the first mention of Messiah, and that was from the lips of a humble, but devout, mother. HMM

Filled and Fulfilled

“For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” (Colossians 1:9)

In this prayer, Paul sought for the Colossian Christians the full knowledge of the will of God. For the Christians at Rome, he prayed they might be filled “with all joy and peace in believing” (Romans 15:13). For the Ephesians, he prayed they “might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:19), and then urged them to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). He wrote to the Philippians, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; . . . Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11). For the Colossians, he also prayed for their “full [same as ‘filled with’] assurance of understanding” (Colossians 2:2).

Together, all these prayer requests constitute an ideal description of a complete Christian—an ideal for which we should all strive and pray—both for ourselves and for others. Summarizing again, the list is as follows:

“[Filled] with all joy and peace in believing.”

“Filled with the fruits of righteousness.”

“Filled with the knowledge of his will.”

“Filled with the Spirit.”

“Filled with all the fulness of God.”

“[Filled with] assurance of understanding.”

It is also worth noting that the Greek word for “filled” is the same as for “fulfilled.” When a Christian is “filled” with all these wonderful realities, he becomes a “fulfillment,” as it were, of God’s purpose in creating and redeeming him. His ultimate goal, of course, is to measure up to “the fulness of Christ” Himself (Ephesians 4:13). HMM

Sunday, November 11

He Shall Speak Peace

“And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.” (Zechariah 9:10)

This wonderful prophecy follows immediately after the verse predicting the coming of the Messiah into Jerusalem riding upon a lowly donkey’s colt (v. 9). That prediction was fulfilled by Jesus as He came into Jerusalem on that last Sunday before His death and resurrection (Matthew 21:4-5), but the prophecy in our text was certainly not fulfilled at that time. There have been wars somewhere in the world practically every year since Jesus came. Nevertheless, the day will come when He shall indeed speak peace to all the nations.

Early in the last century the nations had fought a great war that was supposed to end all wars. They celebrated the armistice that ended that war on November 11, 1918, and established an annual holiday called Armistice Day. But many other wars followed that war, so the name was changed to honor the veterans who had fought in any of those later wars as well. However, there is still no real peace in the world.

The fact is that there can be no lasting peace between men and other men until there is peace between men and God. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can make such a peace, for He alone is the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Indeed, He has already paid the price to make such true and eternal peace, for He “made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:20).

In that great coming day when He returns to Earth to establish His kingdom, “he maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth” (Psalm 46:9), “and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isaiah 2:17). HMM

Monday, November 12

Christ at Creation

“When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep.” (Proverbs 8:27-28)

This chapter contains a beautiful description of some of God’s works during the creation week when God, in Christ, was creating and making all things. Christ Himself, personified as the divine wisdom, the word of God, is speaking.

Verse 27 speaks of His pre-existence before the creation of the space/time universe itself. At first the “earth” matter was “without form,” with only a great “deep” of water. Then God “set a compass” on the face of the deep, activating the gravitational forces that brought it into spherical form. The Hebrew word for “compass” means “sphere,” the same word used in Isaiah 40:22, where it is said God “sitteth upon the circle [i.e., ‘sphere’] of the earth.”

Then God “established the clouds above.” The word for “clouds” means “thin mists,” undoubtedly referring to the great water canopy “above the firmament” (Genesis 1:7). Finally, He strengthened the fountains of the deep, locking them under the “foundations of the earth” (Proverbs 8:29). The same strong fountains of the deep would later be broken up at the time of the great Flood. When the earth was finished, He “rejoiced in the habitable part of his earth” (i.e., Proverbs 8:31).

In all these and the other mighty works of creating and making all things, the Lord Jesus Christ assures us “I was there!” That further assures us, of course, that through all the ages to come, He will be there.

This remarkable eighth chapter of Proverbs concludes with the following exhortation, more relevant today than ever: “For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the LORD. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all that hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:35-36). HMM

Tuesday, November 13

Mortified

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”
(Romans 8:13)

To mortify something means to put it to death. Paul taught in our text and in other passages that the “deeds of the body,” or its fleshly actions and appetites, all that pertains “to the old man,” should be mortified, or put to death.

This mortification is first of all judicial—Christ having been put to death in our stead. “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6).

But the mortification must not stop there, with only a positional death. It must also be an actual mortification in practice, for “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:24-25). “For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Romans 6:19).

Elsewhere, Paul identifies specific deeds and attitudes that must be mortified. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence [or evil desires], and covetousness” (Colossians 3:5). The first four listed will be recognized as various forms of sensual sins, indicating how detrimental this category of sin is to spiritual life. The fifth is covetousness, or inordinate love of money and material things. These five comprise deadly sins to men and women of any historical age—particularly our own. If they are not put to death, they bring death, “for which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh” (v. 6).

The choice is clear! It will be either death to the flesh, or death to the spirit. JDM

Wednesday, November 14

Total Abstinence

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”
(1 Peter 2:11)

The command to *abstain* occurs only a few times in the New Testament, but there are three occurrences that are especially relevant for Christians today. One of these is 1 Thessalonians 4:3: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” The Greek word here actually applies to any type of sexual relationship outside of marriage, and the command is not merely for temperance or for “love” in one’s non-marital sexual relationships, but for *total abstinence*. This exhortation is perhaps needed more today than at any time since the days of pagan Rome, even for Christians and, unfortunately, Christian leaders. But that is not all. In the words of our text, we are also urgently exhorted to “abstain from fleshly lusts” since these carnal desires are in mortal combat with our very souls. One must avoid situations that might initiate or encourage fornication or its kindred activities.

But even that is not sufficient for the serious Christian man or woman. “Now we exhort you, brethren, . . . Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:14, 22). The word here means anything that in outward form might appear to be evil, regardless of whether it is really wrong in itself or not. The Lord desires that we “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10) and that we “give none offense” (1 Corinthians 10:32).

A believer cannot afford to be careless in this warfare against his soul. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). HMM

Thursday, November 15

The Remarkable Psalms

“And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” (Acts 13:32-33)

Here is a clear instance in which the gospel (“glad tidings”) was preached in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit, through the psalmist David, promised that one day the Son of God would rise from the dead—the “first born from the dead” (Colossians 1:18). The Lord Jesus actually used certain psalms to prove His own deity, quoting Psalm 110:1 (Matthew 22:43-45) and Psalm 82:6 (John 10:34-36) in support of His claims.

This unique passage in the book of Acts offers another fascinating item of information that is often overlooked. By identifying the *second* psalm as such, the writer (guided by the Spirit) tells us in effect that the chapter divisions of the book of Psalms were there by divine ordination right from the first. Furthermore, since each of the psalms is a poem, with clear-cut verse divisions, this longest book in the Word of God was evidently subdivided into chapters and verses by divine inspiration. Similar divisions were later added to the other books by biblical scholars in the Middle Ages, but they were in the psalms from the beginning. It is not surprising, then, that we can find many remarkable examples of design in the very structure of the book of Psalms (e.g., the 22 stanzas of eight verses each in Psalm 119).

This second psalm is the first of the so-called Messianic psalms, but actually, the Lord Jesus Christ and His glorious gospel of salvation are clearly present in every one of the 150 psalms. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Psalm 2:12). HMM

Friday, November 16

Earnestly Contend

“It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 1:3)

After Jude had responded to the Holy Spirit’s prompting to direct his thoughts away from writing a gospel account, the intensity of the growing battle for “the faith” came into focus. Perhaps Jude was aware of Paul’s observation that we do not “wrestle” against ordinary forces, but our battle deals with the “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

The special word chosen by the Holy Spirit to speak to this struggle in Jude’s letter was *epagonizomai*. The core word (*agonizomai*) is used in the famous passage “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). Paul also notes what “great conflict” he felt for the church at Colosse (Colossians 2:1) and that Epaphras was “always labouring fervently” for them in his prayers (Colossians 4:12).

The object of this spiritual struggle was “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” Two matters are of importance in that little phrase. First, “the faith” is a specific designation used in the New Testament to incorporate the basic doctrines of the New Covenant. It does include, but does not limit itself to, the belief that results in salvation. The early churches were “established in the faith” (Acts 16:5). We are to “stand fast in the faith” (1 Corinthians 16:13) and to come to a “unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:13).

Second, that body of doctrine was “once delivered to the saints.” Implicit in that comment is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to “guide [the apostles] into all truth” (John 16:13). Both Old and New Testaments insist that we are not to add or subtract from the words of God’s Word. Jude’s epistle emphasizes the awful judgment that comes upon those who would distort or disdain what is “the faith.” HMM III

Saturday, November 17

Dead Works

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and a faith toward God.” (Hebrews 6:1)

The phrase “dead works” can be found only twice in the New Testament. In the first (our text), it refers to the deeds of the unsaved sinner from which he must turn away in salvation, while in the second, later in the same epistle, it refers to unprofitable deeds accomplished by the believer, from which we must also turn away (Hebrews 9:14).

Dead works are certainly not *good* works, but neither are they necessarily *evil* works. Rather, they are ineffective, useless acts that count for nothing. They are as different from evil or good works as *wild* fruit is from *good* fruit or *bad* fruit. In this analogy, while bad fruit looks unappealing and would never pass for food, wild fruit may have the appearance of good fruit but lacks flavor and nutritional value and would provide no useful function even if it were eaten. In just the same way, dead works, which may be of some humanitarian value, lack life—not stemming from proper motives and not being propelled by love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) and thus accomplish nothing of lasting value.

The non-Christian can pridefully indulge in such works, but this must be repented of at the point of salvation. Likewise, the Christian must replace his useless *dead works* with *good works* through the power of the Spirit of the living God. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from *dead works* to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).

May we continually submit all our efforts to Him, recognizing that service to the living God does not entail our dead works. JDM

The Angelic Shout

“. . . when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:7)

The phrase “shouted for joy” in this verse is actually a single word (*ruwa*) in the Hebrew, and it can carry a number of meanings. It is most frequently translated simply “shout,” as when the army of Joshua surrounding Jericho shouted and the walls fell down (Joshua 6:20). In Psalm 100:1, it is translated “make a joyful noise.” It can refer to a shout of alarm or shout of triumph, as well as a shout of joy, but it always refers to a *loud* shout. In fact, it comes from a root meaning “to split”—a noise that would split eardrums or shatter glass.

In the context of Job 38, the Lord is reminding Job and his friends of the great primeval event of creation. When the earth—which is destined eventually to house God’s throne in the eternal ages to come—was established on solid foundations (on the third day of creation), a resounding noise like mighty thunder—or, better, a gigantic angelic anthem—echoed throughout the universe. An “innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22), identified in the poetic structure of the Hebrew parallelism in our text as both “morning stars” and “sons of God,” shouted exultantly and sang in unison when the solid earth appeared.

The angels probably were created on the first day of the creation week, immediately after the creation of the universe itself. Even though Satan and other angels later rebelled against God, most of the angels still obey Him, and one day we ourselves will actually hear them singing His praises and shouting for joy when He returns to Earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 4:9-11; 5:11-14; Psalm 148:1-6).

Therefore, “praise ye him all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts” (Psalm 148:2). Someday, we shall join them in a “joyful noise” at God’s throne. HMM

Monday, November 19

Certain Men

“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation.” (Jude 1:4)

Jude speaks severely of these “certain men” who were “before ordained” (literally “written about beforehand”) for a very specific judgment. The context relates back to the period of the Old Testament, although Jude later identifies others who are apparently active in the early churches.

A purification of 30 days was required of “certain men” who were (apparently) undertakers during the time of Moses. They were “defiled” by their contact with dead bodies according to the law but must still keep the Passover—albeit a month after the other Israelites (Numbers 9:4-11). God does not allow excuses.

Later, “certain men” among the Israelites who had apostatized and become “children of Belial” were to be destroyed, along with their city and all of their possessions, after it had been definitely determined that they had left Israel and become part of a cult community (Deuteronomy 13:13-16). God does not take prisoners!

During the time of Jeremiah’s ministry, God allowed the evil king Jehoiakim to send “certain men” down into Egypt to capture the prophet Urijah so the king could kill him (Jeremiah 26:22-23). God does allow evil men to gain the upper hand temporarily as He brings about the fulfillment of His prophetic warnings—in this case, the captivity of Judah by Babylon.

Jude speaks of “certain men” who had been “written before” (*prographo*) as historical examples of those among the New Testament saints who were “denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 4b). Peter puts it this way: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1). HMM III

Tuesday, November 20

The Lord Our Shield

“But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.” (Psalm 3:3)

The beautiful metaphor of God as our shield, and our protector from evil, is used over 15 times in the book of Psalms, the first being in our text above. The very first time it is used in the Bible, however, is also the first time the word “shield” itself is used. That was the time when God assured Abram, after his battle with the armies of the northern kings: “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield” (Genesis 15:1). This was a great comfort to Abram, there in the land of the Canaanites, where evil and enemies surrounded him on all sides.

But consider also a few of the many “shield” promises in the book of Psalms. One of the most beautiful and most uplifting is Psalm 84:11: “For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

And consider also this wonderful promise: “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler [same word] to all those that trust in him” (Psalm 18:30). In the same psalm appears this great testimony: “Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great” (Psalm 18:35).

Three times in Psalm 115 appears the injunction to “trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield” (Psalm 115:9-11). Similarly, “thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word” (Psalm 119:114).

The final reference in Psalms to the Lord as our shield is “Blessed be the LORD my strength. . . . My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me” (Psalm 144:1-2). HMM

Wednesday, November 21

Misuse of the Bible

“. . . his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:16)

It is vitally important for every Christian to study and use the Scriptures, for they constitute our only real authority (note Matthew 5:18; John 10:35; 14:26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; etc.). In doing this, however, it is just as important that we not misuse the Scriptures, for this can be almost as dangerous as ignoring them altogether.

Many people twist the Scriptures, seeking to make them fit some opinion of their own, hoping thereby to give a pseudo-biblical authority to their peculiar prejudices, instead of allowing the Lord to say what He means. Such distortion of Scripture has generated a plethora of cults and heresies—past and present. This was essentially Christ’s view of the Pharisees: “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

Similar—perhaps even worse—is claiming to receive new Scripture, or perhaps new (and authoritative) insight on existing Scripture. “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it” (Deuteronomy 4:2). “Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:6).

Cults and heretics distort and supplement the Scriptures, but still deadlier are the liberals who try to explain away the Scriptures. “If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life” (Revelation 22:19). This act of distorting and then denying God’s Word (“Yea, hath God said. . . . Ye shall not surely die,” Genesis 3:1, 4) was the very lie of Satan that brought sin into the world. No wonder the Bible warns so severely against it! HMM

Thursday, November 22

The Son of Thankfulness

“And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.” (Genesis 29:35)

This verse is the testimony of Jacob’s first wife, Leah, at the time of the birth of her fourth son. It also is significant in that it contains the first mention of the Hebrew *yadah*, often rendered “praise” but more often “thank” or “thanks.” In fact, she even named her son Judah, which is essentially the same Hebrew word.

Although Reuben, Simeon, and Levi were all older sons of Leah, God chose Judah to be the father of the tribe through which Christ would come into the world. Whenever Leah spoke to her son, she would actually be calling him “Thanks” and thus in effect remembering her gratitude for this gift of a special son.

We also continue to give thanks every day for that special Son of the tribe of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And as Judah later was willing to offer his own life for his brother Benjamin (see Genesis 43:9) out of love for both his brethren and his father, so this distant grandson of Judah was willing to lay down His own life to save those whom He was glad to call His brethren (Hebrews 2:11-12).

In the last reference to Judah in the Bible, this son of Judah is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” who will one day be acknowledged as King over all the earth (Revelation 5:5). The last mention of “thanks” in the Bible is when the elders of the church in heaven cry out: “We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and has reigned” (Revelation 11:17).

We surely have much for which we thank God, but most of all we are thankful for the Son of God, our Creator, Savior, and coming King. HMM

Friday, November 23

The Unknown Creator

“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” (John 1:10)

This verse is surely one of the saddest, most poignant verses in all the Word of God. In the Lord Jesus Christ, our Creator/ Redeemer, “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). The atoms of our bodies are sustained by Him (Colossians 1:17), yet multitudes ignore Him, ridicule Him, and take His name in vain. What presumption! What foolishness!

Once He even entered visibly into the world He had created so that people actually could *hear* His words of life and *see* His works of love. But they willfully refused to acknowledge Him, and then hung Him on a cross to die.

The height of irony and the depth of foolishness are reached when those whose very minds and bodies were created by Christ refuse even to admit the fact of creation. In effect, they turn Psalm 100:3 upside down and claim: “It is not he that hath made us—it is we ourselves!” Not only do modern men deny His creation, they also reject His salvation, thinking they can save themselves.

It is important to note that John 1:10 specifically refers to the refusal of the “world” to know Him as its Creator. It was made by Him but would not acknowledge His work of creation. How then could the world ever “receive” Him as its Savior (v. 11)? Only its Creator could ever become its Savior, since no one else in all creation was both deserving and capable of such a mission.

Even more inexcusable than those who rejected Him when He was here in the world are those who reject Him today. With all the marvelous evidences of creative design in nature as revealed by modern science, plus the unanswerable evidences of His own bodily resurrection from the dead, it is wicked foolishness for modern men and women still to reject Him as their Creator and Savior. HMM

Saturday, November 24

What Began at Philippi

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi . . . Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:1-2)

The church at Philippi was birthed on one of Paul’s missionary journeys. He was summoned there in a vision by an unidentified man in Macedonia (now Greece) pleading for him to come and help them (Acts 16:9-10). Recognizing the call was from the Lord, he went immediately.

Paul’s European ministry began with the conversion of Lydia, who worshipped God and readily followed Paul’s teachings (Acts 16:14). Paul soon traveled to Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, where he encountered much hardship and persecution. But the work he had begun in Philippi continued, eventually spreading throughout the continent. The intensely personal letter he later wrote to the Philippian church contains some of the most important doctrinal truths concerning Christ and our victorious life in Christ in all of Scripture.

God’s sovereign plan included Europe. He saw to it that the governmental roadblocks and personal opposition were ultimately unsuccessful. Today, many individual Christians trace their ancestry back to Europe. Great evangelistic movements and worldwide missionary efforts over the centuries have European roots. The God-ensured preservation of the Scriptures primarily occurred there as well. Many of the important Bible study tools and preaching helps come through the Western church. Many seminaries and Bible colleges, as well as hospitals and humanitarian efforts, stem from the Western tradition.

Today, great numbers are thankfully turning to Christ around the world, but much of the Church’s work began in Philippi as a faithful witness fearlessly and sacrificially preached the Good News of Jesus Christ. JDM

Sunday, November 25

The Dayspring from on High

“Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.” (Luke 1:78)

This is an unusual, but beautiful, name of the coming Savior given Him by Zacharias when he was “filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied” (Luke 1:67). In that same prophecy, Zacharias also called that coming one “the Highest” and “the Lord” who would “give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” (vv. 76-77). Just six months later, Jesus was born.

The Greek word here translated “dayspring” is so translated only this one time. It refers to the metaphorical spring from which the sun springs forth each day, and so is usually translated simply as “the east.” It is interesting that it is used three times in connection with the story of the wise men “from the east” who saw “his star in the east,” and then, when they reached Bethlehem once again, “the star, which they saw in the east,” led them to the one who was Himself “the dayspring” (Matthew 2:1-2, 9).

There is one other sunrise appropriately presaged here. Many years later, the women who had tearfully watched the Lord being crucified and buried came to His sepulcher to anoint Him with sweet spices “at the rising of the sun” (Mark 16:2) immediately after He had risen from the dead. Here a closely related word is the word translated “rising.”

There is another great sunrise coming, as promised in the last chapter of the Old Testament. “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). He who is Himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12) will someday even replace the sun in the new Jerusalem. There will never be another sunrise after that, for “there shall be no night there . . . neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light” (Revelation 22:5). HMM

Monday, November 26

The Meaning of “Day”

“And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”
(Genesis 1:5)

Many people today, professing to believe the Bible, have compromised with the evolutionary philosophy that dominates our society by accepting its framework of geological ages. This system interprets the rocks and fossils in terms of a supposed 4.6 billion-year history of the earth and life culminating in the evolution of early humans perhaps a million years ago. In order to justify this compromise, they usually say that the “days” of creation really correspond to the geological ages, arguing that the Hebrew word for “day” (*yom*) does not have to mean a literal solar day.

Oh, yes, it does—at least in Genesis 1! God, knowing that the pagan philosophers of antiquity would soon try to distort His record of creation into long ages of pantheistic evolution (as in the Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and other such ancient cosmogonies), was careful to define His terms! “God called the light Day,” and that was the first day with its evening and morning. All subsequent days have followed the same pattern—a period of darkness (night), then a period of light (day).

One may quibble about the exact length of the day if he insists (e.g., equatorial days versus polar days), but there is no way this definition can accommodate a geological age. This is the very first reference to “day” (or *yom*) in the Bible, and this is given as an actual statement of the meaning of the word.

This ought to settle the question for anyone who really believes the Bible. One may decide to believe the evolutionary geologists if he wishes instead of God, but he should at least let God speak for Himself. God says the days of creation were literal days, not ages. “In six days the LORD made heaven and earth” (Exodus 31:17). HMM

Tuesday, November 27

Creeping in Unawares

“For there are certain men crept in unawares . . . ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:4)

The special word chosen by the Holy Spirit is most helpful in understanding this warning. The Greek term translated “crept in unawares” is *pareisduno*, a uniquely compounded word meaning to “sink down in alongside.” What could be more descriptive? These kinds of sneaky people have been written about before, Jude says, and are prime examples of those who transpose the grace of God into uncontrolled lust.

Paul uses a similar word in his letter to Timothy to warn him about the ungodly men of the last days who “creep into houses” and undermine the lifestyles of “silly women” (2 Timothy 3:6-7). The imagery implies the subtlety and cleverness of these “ungodly men,” but there is a horrible consequence of this replacement of God’s grace with “lasciviousness.”

Jude lists the terrible judgment on the people of Israel who refused to believe the good report of Joshua and Caleb when the 12 spies returned from the land of Canaan. God “destroyed” those who embraced the fearful and faithless report of the 10 (Numbers 14). Even the angels who led the world of Noah into corruption (Genesis 6:1-4) were chained in “darkness” for their disobedience (2 Peter 2:4).

Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, and Korah (Core) are all given as examples by Jude of God’s stern judgment on those who knew better but chose to lead a rebellion against the righteous lifestyles or leadership of God’s people. God does not take lightly the misuse of His instructions. Even the “least” of the commandments are important (Matthew 5:19). After all, “thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psalm 138:2). HMM III

Wednesday, November 28

Light in the Darkness

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” (Isaiah 9:2)

This beautiful verse is treated in the New Testament as a Messianic prophecy, fulfilled when Christ came into the world—growing up in Nazareth and then dwelling in Capernaum, both cities being located in “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Matthew 4:15). This was in the region once occupied by the 10 northern tribes and then devastated by the invading Assyrians when they carried the Northern Kingdom away into captivity.

This region had for centuries thereafter remained in spiritual darkness, even after the return of Judah from captivity in Babylon. But then Christ came, and “from that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Thus, His public ministry actually began in this land of darkness. “And the light shineth in darkness. . . . the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:5, 9).

Wherever Christ comes, the light comes, for He is light. He left heaven for Earth, saying: “I come to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:9). This great purpose of God “is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

And yet, tragically, “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d” (John 3:19-20). To those who desire light, Jesus says: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). HMM

Thursday, November 29

The Second Remnant

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.” (Isaiah 11:11)

The great prophet Isaiah lived during the time when the 10 tribes of Israel were being carried into captivity by the Assyrians, and about a hundred years before his own nation of Judah would be carried into exile by the Babylonians. Yet, in one of the most remarkable prophecies of the Bible (Isaiah 44:28–45:6), Isaiah promised that his people would someday return and build Jerusalem and its temple again. Furthermore, he even named the future emperor of Persia (the nation that would succeed Assyria and Babylonia as the dominant world power), calling him Cyrus. This great king fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy about 175 years after it was given (note Ezra 1:1-4).

But Isaiah not only prophesied this first return from exile, as noted in the key verse above; he foresaw that, in the distant future, God would also “set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people.” The context of this passage is nothing less than the glorious future time of Messiah’s reign over all the earth (Isaiah 11:9-10). The outcasts of Israel and Judah would return home, not only from the nations of the Middle East, which will evidently be active enemies of Israel again in that future day (note that Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, and Hamath were the ancient names of the nations now identified as Upper Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, respectively), but even from “the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:12). Isaiah thus predicted an even greater exile and worldwide homecoming long beyond that of the Babylonian captivity. Such information could have come only from God Himself. HMM

Friday, November 30

The Penalty of Unbelief

“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.” (Jude 1:5)

This is the first example Jude provides of those who refused to respond to God’s leading and gracious provision. Israel witnessed stunning miracles, and a few very public judgments, before the 12 spies were sent out to investigate the Promised Land.

For example, the Passover was a wonderful, fearful event. God showed His hand both in salvation of those who obeyed and in swift judgment on those who refused.

Israel’s exodus from Egypt was unique. Not only did God enrich the nation in one day but demonstrated His awesome power at the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh’s army. Everyone in Israel observed this. They all experienced God’s power firsthand.

On the way to Mount Sinai, the bitter water of Marah was made sweet for them to drink even after they complained—bitterly. The daily miracle of the manna was given to feed them, and water was provided out of the rock for them to drink. God’s grace and mercy were just about everywhere.

Even after the nation had arrived at the holy mountain and the fearful giving of the Law was accomplished in their sight, Israel rebelled with the celebration of the golden calf. God’s judgment was swift, and thousands died.

The nation did not learn their lesson even though they had a revival while giving, building, and dedicating the tabernacle for worship. After all that, Moses sent out the 12 men to “spy out the land.” When the nation refused to trust God, He condemned everyone 20 and older to die in the wilderness, except for faithful Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 14:29-30). “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). HMM III



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