

Apocalypse Now

The Prince, the Dragon, and the Bride

Revelation 12-22

-Book 3 of 3-

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In Anguish for Delivery

Can Jesus Be Born Again?

(Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17)

I had a really hard week. I can't tell you all the things that happened in my week, but I'm *really exhausted*. So what I'd like to do is for us to pray a little while, and then we're going to end early.

I know what some of you are thinking: "Well, you ought to preach anyway! We all had hard weeks." If that's you, I want to say to you, you don't understand. *You don't know*. You're not me.

You don't know what it's like to be a pastor of a large church with crises and confidences you have to keep. You don't know what it is to be a boss to a bunch of people in this Christian fishbowl, and you're supposed to hold them accountable and be liked by everybody at the same time.

You don't know what it's like to preach week after week for nine years, to feel as if you get up and *bleed* on people, spill your heart, and then they criticize and step on it. Then next week you have to go right back, sit in your office, and wonder what God wants to say to everybody . . . a "fresh word" from God. You stare at some text that is utterly confusing, and if you kind of understand it, then you have to serve it up simple to everybody.

You don't know. It's a lonely place. I'm exhausted, tired, frustrated . . . accountable to God and to you and to a Session and to a wife and to four little kids . . . sometimes I sit there in my office in absolute *anguish*.

The two pastors at the churches where I was before this one both ran from that anguish into a string of illicit affairs. My old friend, who I knew from high school and who was a pastor in Missouri, ran from that anguish by sitting in his garage and asphyxiating himself, leaving his wife and kids behind.

So who are *you* to tell me what I should do? *You* don't know. You're not me.

I imagine some of you are worried about me right now. Some of you are probably mad at me. You say this:

That's great. But preacher, you're not me. I'm here. You don't know what it is to be me. You don't understand. You don't know what it is to be diagnosed with cancer and be given a few months to live. You don't know what it is to be married to my spouse.

You don't know what it is to live with the anguish I have from my past, but I'm still here! You don't know what it is to live with chronic fatigue and pain! You don't know me! You're not me! You don't understand. Nobody understands . . . *God* doesn't understand!

He doesn't know what it's like to be me, to be poor and oppressed, to be born into filth and live in an oppressed country, to be rejected and denied and reviled by church and by friends and by family, to lose your own father and to feel sometimes like the weight of the world—the sin and shame—is heaped on your back, to feel forsaken by God! How would *God* know what it is to be forsaken by God, to feel like you've been stripped and beaten and nailed to the wall naked — crucified!?

Wait a minute. Maybe He does.

Sydney Carter wrote a poem that goes like this:

But God is up in heaven
And he doesn't do a thing,
With a million angels watching,
And they never move a wing. . . .
It's God they ought to crucify
Instead of you and me,
I said to this Carpenter
A-hanging on the tree.

And now I had better stop for a minute; some of you may still be worried about me. I'm *fine*. Don't be worried. Some of you may still be mad. Don't be! I'm sorry. And some of you realize that I'm lying about not preaching, for, in fact, *I am*.

So far in the Revelation, we have seen incredible anguish. For the last eight chapters, *anguish*. And it's all been a part of opening this incredible scroll in order to deliver its Word. And now the scroll is open.

REVELATION 12:1-6: *And a great portent [a sign] appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught*

up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

(In verses 7-12 there is a great war in the heavenlies, and Satan is cast down.)

REVELATION 12:13-17: *And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And the dragon stood on the sand of the sea.*

So the scroll is opened, with all heaven and creation wondering what's in it, and a woman delivers a baby. Almost all Bible teachers are unanimous on the identity of that baby. It's the Word of God, Jesus. But who is this *woman*? That's the confusing part.

Catholic theologians have argued that she's Mary. But she's kind of *large* for Mary.

Some argue that the woman is Eve, and that makes some sense. If you'll remember, long ago Eve had a run-in with the Dragon in the garden. He tempted her, she fell, along with Adam; God shows up, curses the dragon, and casts it to the earth saying, "You will crawl on your belly all the days of your life."

Then He says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed, Dragon, and hers. And *he* [her seed] will crush your head, and you will crush his heel." Then God said to Eve, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth." *Anguish*. "The seed will save you, Eve, and you will give birth to the seed in anguish" (Genesis 3).

It's pretty clear that Jesus *is* that promised seed. But technically, Eve didn't give birth to Jesus, except through a long line—a genealogy—a lineage—a bunch of other mothers. So some people have argued that that woman is that genealogy, or that the woman is Israel.

The woman is clothed with the "sun, moon, and stars." Joseph had a dream of his family in which they were "sun, moon and stars." So it seems the woman must *at least* be Israel, and *at least* Eve, and *at least* Mary, and somehow that genealogy from Eve to Mary.

By the way, that genealogy makes for some rather sordid ancestors and mothers in Jesus' past. It starts off with Eve, the mother of all sinners, the original sinner. Then Abraham pimped his wife. David, Jesus' great-great-great-grandfather, murdered the husband of Jesus' great-great-great-grandmother Bathsheba, so he could have sex with her.

Then there's a host of lesser-known sinners like Rahab, the Gentile harlot. (Jesus had quite a bit of Gentile blood, it seems.) Jesus was of the house of Judah, but that was only because his great-great-great-great-grandmother Tamar disguised herself as a hooker and got her father-in-law Judah to have sex with her.

It's quite a lineage. And just like the stable where Jesus was born, Jesus doesn't seem all that concerned about hiding the mess.

Philip Yancey wrote in one of his books, "These shady ancestors show that Jesus entered human history in the raw, a willing descendant of its shame. In contrast, Herod the Great, reigning king at Jesus' birth, had his genealogical records destroyed out of vanity."

Just think of it: The promised seed from God Himself implanted in poor, teen-age peasant flesh from that lineage; then born in desperation and confusion in a stinking barn in an occupied and oppressed country. That must have been *incredible anguish!*

So maybe He *does* know what it's like. Maybe He really did empty Himself and take the form of a slave. Maybe He really is born of the woman in anguish. Maybe He really *did* wrap Himself in flesh like mine, had gas and heartburn, and smelled like gym socks after a long hike. And when He was tired, maybe He was tempted to sleep with Mary Magdalene, get drunk on that new wine, and go to bed and stay in bed and never preach! Maybe He was tempted like that, or do you not believe that He was "tempted in every way, as we are, yet without sin"?

Some would argue, then, that the woman in Revelation 12 is Israel, or the genealogy of Jesus. Yet after the child is taken up into heaven, this woman has more kids. These children bear testimony to Jesus, and that hardly sounds like Israel, at least the Israel we normally think of. Yet you must remember that Paul and John taught that we—the Church—*are* Israel.

But we are Jesus' brothers and sisters, right? . . . not mother. Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50). Believers, you *are* Christ's brothers and sisters, and that means you have the same father as Jesus. But that also

means you have the same *mother* as Jesus, and you *are* that mother! (Sounds like the ultimate, red-neck family tree, doesn't it? — no branches.)

But that's what Jesus said: "Whoever does the will of my Father is . . . my mother." He told us who His mother was. So then the woman must be God's people throughout time . . . whoever does the will of the Father throughout time.

Jesus was born in His flesh, in space and time, in Bethlehem of Judea, to Mary the virgin. Yet in Revelation 12, it seems to refer to more than simply Jesus' birth to Mary in Bethlehem . . . and to more than His life in Palestine . . . and to more than His ascension in Acts 1. (In verse five, He is caught up to the throne, and it doesn't even mention the cross.)

In what way could Jesus be born and live and ascend more than once in Bethlehem and Palestine? How is it that Paul could write that He was tempted in every way as I am and you are? He's never been raped as a woman! He's never had to moderate a Session meeting during a budget crisis! And how is it that *I* could be His mother? How could I be that woman in Revelation 12?

The seven churches in Asia Minor were next door to the province of Galatia. So these churches that received the Revelation probably had Galatians as well as Ephesians and Colossians. In Galatians, Paul writes, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."

Well, how did He *get* there? Paul goes on to tell the Galatians that he—Paul—is in travail—birth pangs—*with* them "until Christ be formed in them." Like Jesus said, His followers are His mother . . . which seems to mean Jesus is born of you all somehow, impregnated with the seed ("sperma" in Greek) of God the Father, Word of God the Father. Jesus born of you as mother, and born in you, formed in you, the Bethlehem of your heart.

That seems weird, yet it's what we sing at Christmastime. "Oh holy child of Bethlehem descend to us we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today." It's not just a song.

In I John 3, John writes that God's seed ("sperma") is in us who belong to Him. In the gospel of John, Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." We throw that phrase around so easily now days. I think we've come to believe that being "born again" is an easy, instantaneous process. Well, after four kids I know it's not such an easy, instantaneous process. The fertilization, on the other hand, is rather instantaneous and easy. Maybe fertilization, receiving the seed—the Word, is the instantaneous, easy process, but pregnancy and delivery can really hurt and last a while! Maybe we should expect some born-again birth pains! *Anguish.*

The woman is in anguish to deliver. In fact, it's such anguish, we really can't do it. "We're born of the spirit," Jesus says, the Spirit of Jesus. The Word is the seed implanted in us, and we're born together with Him. The *me* that's born again is *Him* in me. "No longer I who live but Christ in me." Christ in me is to live. He's born of me in me — the *new me*.

In Matthew 24, Jesus sits His disciples down and talks of wars and rumors of wars; of earthquakes and famines. He basically talks about all the broken seals and trumpets we've been looking at in the Revelation. Then He calls them *birth pangs*.

Well, who's being born?

In Romans 8, Paul writes this: "The entire creation and we ourselves groan as in labor"—travail—birth pangs. Who's being born? According to Paul, the sons of glory . . . you guys . . . us . . . the Church . . . the body of Christ. Christ

in us is being born.

In Revelation 12, the woman—us—is clothed with sun, moon, and stars, clothed with creation. The creation is like our delivery room, creation and the woman “in anguish to deliver.” Jesus is born *of you* and *in you* . . . in anguish.

Last year at the Living Stone Service, a friend got up and shared a vision she had had. She described this stable; she said it was like the one in Bethlehem. It was poor, unkempt, run-down, and full of filth and issues of blood.

She said, “As I looked at the stable, in the midst of it enthroned I saw Him in all His beauty—the Lord Jesus. That stable is our hearts. His life is born in my filthy, anguished stable.”

So He knows. He understands. He feels what His body feels. I am His body. You *are* His body. He was born into His earthly flesh in Bethlehem of Judea, but He’s also born into *my* body here in Golden. And that’s wonderful news, because that means that I’m known, and I am not alone. That is wonderful news!

It’s also very challenging news . . . because I can never say to Him, “You’re not me!” because He *is*, or “You don’t understand!” because He *does*. When He tells me to do something like preach and get up off my lazy tail and endure, I can’t use those old lines and excuses on Him.

We all long to be known, yet we all hang on to *not* being known, because we use our secret anguish as an excuse and justification for sin. Yet when we do that, it traps us deeper and deeper into defeat, sin, loneliness, and more anguish. No one can speak into our anguish. The Dragon knows that. So we say things like this:

Nobody knows my sufferings and sorrows!
Nobody knows what it’s like to be me. So
nobody can tell me to stop drinking or stop
eating or stop using porn or stop gossiping.

No one can tell *me* that I have to forgive them. *They* don't know what it's like! No one can tell me that I can't hate.

No one can tell me that I have to "faithfully endure all the way unto death," as in Smyrna, or that I have to stop "sleeping with Jezebel," like in Thyatira, or "hold fast in poverty and weakness," as in Philadelphia. No one can tell me!

Wrong. Jesus can. He has authority to speak into your anguish because He is born in your anguish. *Of course* He writes, "My seven churches, I know your works, and I know your tribulations, and I know where you dwell. It's where I dwell."

At the Living Stone Service, my friend continued, saying something like this: "Jesus is in that stable (your heart) and will stay if you've asked Him there. But He wants you to renounce your sins so together you can clean up His temple."

The Ark is in the temple. He is born in anguish, *into* the anguish, to deliver us from our anguish.

In Revelation, Christ addresses the "Spirit" or "Angel" in the seven churches. I suspect the Angel is His own Spirit born in them, into their mess and anguish, in order to deliver them.

Babies are born in anguish ever since that day in the Garden long ago when God prescribed anguish in delivery. The woman in Revelation 12 is in *anguish* to be delivered.

When we deny the anguish in our hearts and don't face it, when we deny our own shame and failure and sin, when we hang on to that anguish like a weapon against God, when we use those places of secret anguish like a trump card for the day of judgment ("Oh, yeah, God, you don't know what it's like! You're not me!"), when we refuse to surrender

our places of anguish to Jesus, we refuse the birth of His life in our lives. For the Christ is born into those places of anguish. “You will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes [old rags], and lying in your manger.”

So many people want to see the King of Glory, but they won’t be caught *dead* in a stable, especially their own stable. It’s too humiliating. We say, “Why is He born *there*? Why does He have to start there?”

A man pulled into a gas station to ask for directions. (Some people think that is a miracle in and of itself . . .) The man said to the gas station attendant, “How do I get to Boston from here?” The attendant looked at him and said, “Well, if *I* was going to Boston, I certainly wouldn’t start here.”

“Why do we have to start here in anguish?” Because that’s where we are, ever since the Fall. So that’s where Christ is born in us, and that’s who Christ is – the Savior – Son of God and Son of Man. He came to bear our sins and sorrows and anguish, so you’ll find Him wrapped in rags and lying in your stable. You see, it is part of who He is.

I have a friend who was tied up, tortured, and raped by two men she had trusted and loved. It was the culmination of many, many things, and she felt she was to blame. She carried unspeakable shame. That event happened decades ago. It was an anguish into which she did not have the strength to look.

Years and years ago she went to a church service. Very simply she received the Word of God—she received Christ into her heart. He was the seed that was planted there, and He grew there. Eventually He gave her the strength to look into that place of anguish. But she *still* didn’t want to surrender to Him in prayer and confession . . . such shame and fear there.

A place like that surely gives you a reason to hate, doesn’t it? Hanging on to it gives you a reason not to forgive. It gives you a reason to despise yourself and resent

God. You can hold it like a weapon against God, and our hearts are so incredibly deceitful that way, we can hold that thing against the God we say we love and not even know it.

It's been very hard, but she has prayed through that place of incredible anguish, laying down hatred and vengeance, and surrendering it to Christ. A few weeks ago she called me. She was so excited. She said, "Peter, I just want to tell you that last night I had the most real dream! I dreamed of Jesus, and it started in that place," and she described it to me:

I was tied up there, and then He appeared. He was wearing this white robe. He walked up to me and untied me from the bed to which I was tied. He bent down and picked me up, and He carried me over to the side of the room and sat me down in a chair. He looked in my eyes and said, "Honey, I'm here to protect your heart and your spirit."

(I believe her heart and spirit are caught up to God and to His throne with Jesus — Revelation 12:5.)

Then Jesus took off His white robe. He wrapped it around me. And I felt entirely safe. Then from that place of safety, I watched as Jesus walked over to that bed and laid down on that bed where I had lain, and He tied Himself to the bed. Then I watched as they came in and did everything to Jesus that they had done to me.

I am convinced that that dream is more real than the chair you are sitting on right now. For my friend *is* the body of Christ, and her anguish *is* His anguish. Her suffering *is*

His suffering. Her guilt *is* His guilt — He took it on the cross. And He's shown her that her scars are on *His body!* They are *His!*

Never be ashamed of *His scars*. Who He is, is born of her anguish . . . and *your* anguish . . . and *my* anguish.

We are His body. So to see Christ, surrender your anguish. He hangs on your cross, and He is born in your stable. Don't use your place of anguish as an excuse for sin. Confess your anguish and sin, and be obedient to Him in that place of anguish, because behold! Christ is born in anguish . . . *of* anguish. The woman is in anguish to deliver Christ in you . . . the Word in you.

It almost seems silly comparing my anguish to my friend's anguish and some of your anguish, but since you're here, probably most of you have encountered the Word, which is Jesus, somewhere in my preaching. And a few people think it just *happens* . . . that God kind of zaps it down. (My brother-in-law said to me a few weeks ago, "Well, what do you *do* during the week?")

I think I should tell you that almost always I sit in my office during the week, and I struggle and I scratch, and my honest prayer is, "God, what the #@!* are You doing?" And I want to run from the anguish. Yet now, after these years, I have to admit this, although it scares me: the Word is born in my anguish. When I am weak, He is strong. I come to see the Savior in the very place where I need to be saved. I surrender my anguish, and then it's *His* anguish. And He conquers it. That's what He does; that's who He is. I see Him as Savior born of that anguish.

So He knows all my anguish because it's *His* anguish. But if it's *His* anguish, it's His eternally and always, which means it was *His* anguish before I was even born. So this is the deeper truth: not that He's come to know *my* anguish, but He is allowing me to taste *His*, the anguish of loving a fallen world . . . *and* the joy of redeeming it.

Listen to John 16. Jesus said:

You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

When my oldest son Jonathan was born, my wife had an incredibly hard time. She had a ruptured placenta, Jon was five and a half weeks early, we didn't even know where the hospital was, she had twenty-four hours of absolutely intense labor . . . we did not know if Jonathan would live. And I wasn't sure my wife would live.

I remember there was blood everywhere, and she was passing out on the table from the pain and exhaustion. I honestly don't think I have ever seen a person in such anguish. I remember thinking to myself, "Well, you had better enjoy *this* baby, if he lives, because you'll never have another one."

As the doctor pulled Jonathan out and held him up in front of my wife, bloody and screaming, she looked at him. The very first words out of her mouth were these: "Oh . . . I want another one!" *Joy!*

Your anguish, sorrow, suffering, and guilt can be your own private Hell, or it can be the birthplace of the King of Glory. Surrender your anguish, and soon you will see Him. And no one will *ever* be able to take your joy away from you!

Further Reading

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. . . .”

-Genesis 3:14-16

Then he [Joseph] dreamed another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream; and behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

-Genesis 37:9

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon [great serpent], with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads.

-Revelation 12:1-3

But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

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Matthew 1:20-21

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in travail; for the children of the desolate one are many more than the children of her that is married."

-Galatians 2:20, 4:19-27

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew'"

-John 3:5-7

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed [sperma] remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. . . . We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in

death.

-I John 3:9-10, 14

You have been born anew, not of perishable seed [sperma] but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God

-I Peter 1:23

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs. . . ."

-Matthew 24:3-8

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

-Romans 8:22-23

The first thing that Jesus promises is suffering: "I tell you . . . you will be weeping and wailing . . . and you will be sorrowful." But he calls these pains birth pains. And so, what seems a hindrance becomes a way; what seems an obstacle becomes a door; and what seems a misfit becomes a cornerstone. Jesus changes our history from a random series of sad incidents and accidents into a constant opportunity for a change of heart.

-Henri Nouwen

There is at the center of reality a groan. And the closer to the center you live, the more you will hear it and the more you will share in it: the center of the creation, the center of the church, the center of ministry, the center of those things that belong to the people of God, and the center of the human race. The closer you move there, the more you will hear the groan--the more you will share the groan. And you will recognize it. . . . Paul says that the groan in creation, in us, in God is a groan not of death, not the death throes; but a groan of childbirth. God is giving birth to something new. God is doing something fresh. God is creating new heaven, new earth, and by the time I have mastered the groan I will have to exchange it—for a WOW!

-Fred Craddock

The wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation.

-Henri Nouwen

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. . . .”

-John 16:20-22

The Dragon

And the Dragon Slayer

(Revelation 12)

I once read about two Tibetan boys who decided to go for a walk in 1941. They wanted to see the world. They wandered over the mountains into Soviet territory where they were conscripted by the Soviet army. They were then captured by the German army and conscripted into their auxiliary service.

Then they were captured by the Americans, and the Americans could not figure out who they were, because they did not speak German or Russian. The Americans called in an expert in Asiatic languages who understood what they were saying and heard their incredible story.

The shocked Americans asked the boys, “Do you two have any questions?” They only had one: “Why were all those people trying to kill each other?”

Can you imagine the horrors they saw? The world at war? The Holocaust? And they didn’t know why . . . no comprehension.

It kind of reminds me of April 20, 1999, Hitler’s birthday, and the Columbine massacre . . . people in shock everywhere . . . everyone asking, “Why were those boys trying to kill everybody?” Now they’re asking, “Who’s to blame? Who’s to hate?”

It kind of reminds me of us. We say things like this: “I thought Jesus was the Sweet Rose of Sharon. I thought He was the Prince of Peace who *cared* for His little lambs. But I’m getting shot at!”

J. R. R. Tolkien wrote this: “It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him.”

REVELATION 12:1-14: *And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.*

Last week we preached that that woman is the people of God in anguish to give birth to Christ in history and in us.

And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom

of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

"Time, times, and half a time" is three and a half years, 1,260 days. It's the length of Jesus' earthly ministry. It's also Daniel's time of the end. I believe it's the time we are in *now*. "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down"

The Devil pursues the woman in the wilderness . . .

REVELATION 12:15-17: *The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry*

with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.

That's us! And we're at war. And it does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, especially if you live near him. We are at war, and that changes things.

My father was a 2nd Lieutenant in World War II. He trained Infantry troops at Camp Roberts before finally being shipped out to the Philippines. I remember hearing him talk several times, when I was a kid in the 70's, about how they kept him state-side time and time again, because he was a good teacher and trainer of the troops. He used to just *ache* . . . *ache* . . . to go to war. (Several of his friends had already died.)

That seemed *so odd* to me, because I grew up during Vietnam. And people weren't exactly sure, it seemed, *why* we were at war. There was a whole lot of debate about who exactly the dragon was. But World War II and Hitler . . . people were just *longing* to slay that dragon. Now we call them "Our Finest Generation" — the "Sons of Glory."

I love to hear my Dad's stories of World War II, especially when he finds another old guy like John Lowell, and they sit down and share stories of the war. They do it in great cheer. *Old dragon slayers*.

I love to hear my Dad's stories . . . or at least *most* of them. One particular evening in the war, after a day of training troops, the story was that a soldier came into my father's barracks. He said:

I've had it! I'm sick of this place, and I'm sick of you. Do you realize that last night I couldn't sleep because I had leg cramps? You are too demanding! You had us marching at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00! Don't get

me wrong, I like hiking and I like camping, but we have entirely *inadequate* restroom facilities. You don't appreciate *me*, and you don't appreciate *my needs*!

I've been reading a book on boundaries, and I think you have some very serious boundary issues of your own. I need *my* time, *my* space; I have *my* boundaries! I signed up for this war because I heard that Bob Hope entertained the troops, and I haven't heard Bob Hope once! And I don't like the songs we're singing!

I don't like the music, I don't like the program, I don't like *you*, I don't like the give-give-give-give, and frankly I think that you're kind of a Borderline Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder anyway. *You make me nervous*! And if something doesn't change, I'm out of here!

Of course that didn't happen in World War II. We were being shot at! And everybody knew we had a war to fight. It was a fight that we would fight unto death against the Dragon, if need be. *Of course* that didn't happen in World War II. It happened in church.

My father trained troops in our nation's army, and my father trained troops in the Kingdom's army, the Church. Growing up in the Church, stuff like that was commonplace. To an objective observer, it might just have appeared that the Church had not included the live Dragon in their calculations.

Sometimes I worry that *we* have not included the live Dragon in *our* calculations.

You need to hear me: You are directly accountable to God, not me, for your time and your giving and the boundaries He has placed upon your life. And our church

will not run without your opinions regarding church budgets, building programs, and music styles. However, sometimes I think that we do kind of forget that we're in a *war*.

When we sing worship songs, we're going to war!
When we pray, we're going to war!
When we give, we're going to war!
When we serve dinner downtown, we're going to war!
When we marry, have kids, and invite our neighbors to church, we're going to war!

And that changes things. You pray more and give more and sing louder and complain less.

Hear me well. I think that we pastors may be the worst of all. Perhaps we have forgotten to include the live Dragon in our calculations, forgotten that we are at war, and forgotten against whom we battle.

In verse eight, we read that the Dragon is the old Serpent, that old Serpent that tempted Adam and Eve and would one day be crushed by the seed of the woman . . . "the old serpent, who is called the Devil." Devil means "slanderer" or "accuser." He is also called Satan, which means "adversary" or "enemy." Satan is a created angelic or spirit being who is in thorough rebellion against God. Jesus said, "There is no truth in Him" (John 8).

But in John 1 we read, "There is a light that enlightens all men." All men have some truth shining in them. Satan has *no truth* in Him . . . thorough in his darkness and rebellion.

In verse nine, we read that he deceives the whole world. Jesus said, "He is a murderer and the father of lies . . . he lies according to his nature" (John 8:44). I read somewhere that the chief punishment of the liar is not so much that he is not believed, but that he *cannot* believe.

Satan does not believe. In the words of John, "The

light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood, comprehended, or overcome it” (John 1:5). For as Tolkien writes, “He weighs all things in the niceties of his malice.” He does not see truth, and he does not comprehend love. He is the liar entirely trapped in his own lies.

And Satan *is not* the equal opposite of God. He is not the “dark side of the force.” Evil does not have an independent existence. It is always corrupted good.

You can never tell a lie unless there’s a truth to tell the lie about. I believe Satan is a negation and a corruption, truly the faceless man. And when he manifests, I suspect he has no face. And if he has a face, he has to steal it from somewhere. He is a thief, a liar, an adversary, and an accuser.

In the Old Testament, Satan appears in the throne room of God, and he accuses the children of Adam. Satan knows the *law* . . . but not love. He calls God to God’s own justice, but not for the same reason. God is just because He is love. Satan is a legalist because he is malice.

That’s where Satan’s great power lay. Hebrews 2:14 reveals that Satan had the power of death. If God’s law declared death, somehow Satan could satiate his lust for destruction. Satan was then free to destroy.

Yet in Hebrews 2, we also learn that Jesus took our flesh and blood and died that He might “destroy him that has the power of death.” — Destroy the destroyer.

Now Satan is thrown down in an absolute rage. Why? Because God has done what is truly inconceivable and incomprehensible to Satan. He has acted in absolute and perfect sacrificial love, what Satan cannot comprehend because he has chosen not to: that God would die for us.

So what Satan thought was his greatest victory—destroying that Messiah, the prophet Jesus—turned out to be his greatest defeat, his own destruction. For God was in Christ that day, reconciling the world to Himself, that their

trespasses would not be counted against them.

So Satan goes to the throne room to accuse the sons of Adam. He looks at the throne and what does he see? — *That man* he destroyed on the cross. He sees the second Adam. He sees the very Lamb that he slaughtered on the throne.

Verse seven says that Michael fought the Dragon, as prophesied in Daniel 12. In verse eleven, it says we (or they) conquer, but it's all by the victory of the Lamb.

Never forget that all this revelation of victory is the scroll unwrapped by a bleeding Lamb on the throne. Satan looks, and he not only sees that Lamb resurrected on the throne, but he sees everyone throughout time who has trusted Him. For He bore their destruction on His cross. For all time all who trust Him were with Him in His death and now are with Him forever in His resurrection — an eternal communion of life, they with Him, and He with them, in every moment (“chronos”) of their life.

Born in their anguish, crucified and resurrected forever,
Easter now applied to every moment,
eternity invading temporality,
God's kairos invading all chronos,
eternal life *now*.

Revelation 14:6: “This is an eternal gospel.”
Revelation 13:8: “The lamb was slain from the foundation of the world” — beyond time. Yet I believe that Satan is a creature of time, like us. So he didn't see it coming. He did not and *would* not.

When Jesus lifted His head in John 12 and said, “Now is this world judged, now is the ruler of this world cast out,” Satan didn't have a *clue*. And so as he destroyed Jesus on the cross, he destroyed himself and all his works for all time. And this was “the plan from the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ,” and Satan flipped the switch

that shone the light.

Jesus always wins.

The love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord *always conquers*, every where and every when. Even when He dies, *especially* when He dies, He conquers.

The loud voice cries, “Rejoice then, O heaven . . . ! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

Satan doesn’t know the truth, for the truth is Jesus. He doesn’t *commune* with truth, but he knows his time is short. And he knows Jesus always wins. In fact, he is now sentenced to watch the victory of Jesus unwrapped in all space and time, even through us.

I used to wonder, “Then why does he still fight? What’s his plan?” Satan has no plan (like God does). Oh, he has *plans*, and he has *schemes*, and he has *wiles*, but they all serve and feed his childish rage. As Lewis puts it:

[A] creature . . . inside out—it’s heart on the surface and its shallowness at the heart. On the surface, great designs and an antagonism to Heaven which involved the fate of worlds: but deep within, when every veil had been pierced, was there, after all, nothing but a black puerility, an aimless empty spitefulness content to sate itself with the tiniest cruelties? . . . [He] is the horrible co-existence of a subtle and incessant intellectual activity with an incapacity to understand anything. . . . mere Christianity commits every Christian to believing that “the Devil is (in the long run) an ass.”

And so he rages in complete and “hole-hearted”

childish, evil fury. And if he could, right now, he would destroy us all on the spot. But he can't, for he has been disarmed.

Paul wrote in Colossians that when Christ died on the cross He disarmed the principalities and powers. They cannot accuse before God, so they have no grounds for destruction. Satan can only operate within the bounds of God's redemptive love and purposes through the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ our Lord. Yet verse seventeen says he still makes war. How can he?

Verse thirteen says he pursues the woman, the people of God. The woman is given the two wings of the great eagle, but the serpent pours a river of water from his mouth after the woman. What *is* that that comes out of the serpent's mouth? Lies, slander, accusations.

I hope you realize that we live in a river of lies. The river threatens to sweep the woman and the church away, but the earth opens its mouth and swallows the river.

I'm not sure what all that means, but have you ever been weighed down by all the lies? Wondering if God even exists and if God even cares about you? If He's even there at all? You're trapped in your own fears, and you go for a walk in the woods or stand on the top of a 14,000-foot peak, and what happens? The wounded earth itself begins to swallow the river. And creation, even subjected to futility, proclaims the glory of God.

What comes from the Dragon's mouth? Lies and accusations. So if he can no longer accuse you in the heavens, he will accuse you on earth.

Accusations divide the people of God and make us cower in fear. Accusations like this: that you are *so* wicked and you are *so* sinful, surely God couldn't love you. Surely He couldn't forgive *that*. So maybe we had just better be afraid of Him and each other. We had better save ourselves, guard ourselves, sew some fig leaves together and hide out of fear . . . cover the anguish. Don't look in the stable. Don't

go to the Hill of the Skull. Play it safe. If your legs are cramping, you had better sit down. If the facilities aren't the best, maybe you had better turn back. If it's taking a whole lot of effort, maybe you had better not *give* any more. In short, maybe you shouldn't fight.

The river is a propaganda campaign to get us, the Church Militant, to surrender to an unarmed man.

Jesus wins. But do not give Satan any ground to feast on your fear, guilt, or shame. *Do not* surrender. Christ calls you to war in order to proclaim and exhibit His eternal victory in every moment of space and time. And it *is* a war. He wasn't joking. It is a fight. "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer! He has overcome the world." Good cheer? In war? *Yes*.

In *Perelandra*, by C. S. Lewis, Ransom the hero battles the "un-man," the faceless man—Satan. And Lewis writes:

Then an experience that perhaps no good man can ever have in our world, came over him—a torrent of perfectly unmixed and lawful hatred. . . . It is perhaps difficult to understand why this filled Ransom not with horror but with a kind of joy. The joy came from finding at last what hatred was made for. As a boy with an axe rejoices on finding a tree . . . so he rejoiced in the perfect congruity between his emotion and its object.

Never hate a human being, for they are the prize to be captured with sacrificial love. But Satan *is your enemy!*

He longs to drink the blood and eat the flesh of the children of Adam. He craves the terror of your children. He delights in death, genocide, rape, and torture. He feeds his passions with the death of 6 million Jews, tens of millions of

Russians, countless millions of Bosnians, Rwandans, and Sudanese, and tens of millions of babies aborted every year in your own back yard. And, oh yeah, this too: He feeds on any shame that you carry with that statistic.

He *is* evil. And I abhor him. I worked really hard on this message, because I long to stick a knife in his bloodless gut and twist. The knife is the Word of God.

Christian, you were born to be a warrior, and this *is* your war. At last you know who your enemy truly is, so slay the Dragon in the joy of the Lord, and *do not fear!* In Christ you've already won.

Watch out for arrogance. Watch out for lust for power. Those things are of the Dragon. But Christ has conquered, and this is the joy: He is in you. His victory is in you. Heaven is upon you. (Luke 10:20: "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.")

In verse fourteen, the woman is given the two wings of the great eagle. I remember that when I read this months ago I prayed, "God, this whole thing is cool, but who is this great eagle?" The next morning I got a call from someone in this room. She said:

Peter, you wouldn't believe what I saw last week in church! Someone told me I should tell you this. During worship I looked out the widows and suddenly I saw this *immense eagle!* Its wings were stretched out over the mountains, and it was looking at us screeching. At first I thought it was angry screeching, but it was His intense holiness. It was the Lord.

Its beak was open, and I heard it shriek these words: "Church of the Living God, I give you all power and dominion to accomplish my will on earth as it is in

heaven. Take hold of what I give you. Let Christ be your banner and song.” Then it quoted the Song of Solomon: “His banner over you is love.”

In Exodus, God tells the Israelites that he “bore them up on eagles’ wings.” My friends, we are given those eagles’ wings—authority. The loud voice in heaven cries, “They conquered [overcame] by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony, loving not their lives even unto death. . . . Rejoice, O heavens!” *Rejoice*. And Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is upon you.”

We conquer when we claim and believe the blood of the Lamb in our own lives and share it with others . . . even, and especially, unto death. That blood is grace, mercy, and the sweet love of God to us.

To us it’s sweet, but to the Dragon it’s the knife twisted in his bloodless gut . . . *poison*. It’s the blood of the Lamb on the throne, declaring the Dragon has *no* grounds for destruction and he himself is destroyed. His time is short.

The blood of the Lamb is spread through the word of your testimony, that is, the story of the life of Jesus and His blood in you.

The massacre at Columbine High School shocked the world. It should not have surprised us. We’re in a war. We argue about who to hate and who our enemy is . . . a house divided . . . but we know who our enemy is. It’s not Eric Harris, it’s not Dylan Klebold, it’s not Adolph Hitler, it’s not Marilyn Manson . . . not the parents, not the Jefferson County Sheriff, not some legislation sitting in some courthouse somewhere. Our enemy is the Dragon. And we *know* how to fight him.

At one point, Eric Harris grabbed Rachel Scott by the hair. She was already shot twice in the leg. Harris held her up and said, “Do you believe in God?” She said, “You know I do.” He pointed his gun at her head and said, “Then

go be with him.” And he shot her.

Was that the Dragon’s victory?

Was the cross the Dragon’s victory?

Months later Rachel’s backpack was returned to her parents. One of the killer’s bullets was in the backpack where it had stopped after passing through her body and hitting her journal. Her journal was her record of her walk with Christ. It was the “word of her testimony.” It contained the normal kind of high school girl stuff but with a whole lot of faith in the blood of the Lamb.

I’m sure Rachel wasn’t perfect, but she did do things like this: For her school talent show, she performed a mime called “Watch the Lamb.” Her friend performed it at her funeral, which was broadcast around the world on CNN.

Incredibly, in her journal it’s clear that she had come to know she would die that year. You can read about it in the best-selling book *Rachel’s Tears*, written by her parents.

A man who saw her funeral on CNN dreamed of her and called her father the next day saying he had had only a few dreams like this in his life, and he was sure it was from God. What he saw was Rachel’s eyes weeping. Tears were dropping from her eyes, and they were watering something that he couldn’t see. He asked, “Do you know what that means?”

Her father had no clue; he thought the guy was strange . . . until he looked in Rachel’s journal. There he found a picture that she had drawn. Up in the corner were her eyes, and thirteen tears were falling down and watering a rose. There were thirteen victims. And Jesus is the Rose of Sharon.

And He was born in anguish at Columbine High. And He conquered the Dragon at Columbine High. And He conquered the Dragon from the foundation of the world.

And what seems like Satan’s greatest victories are his greatest defeats. They are the place where Jesus exhibits His

conquest of sacrificial love.

And as for Rachel, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, she was changed. I suspect she found herself at a great banquet. I suspect she's sitting there still. I imagine she's sharing war stories with Jesus . . . in *great cheer!* They are both old Dragon slayers.

The name "Rachel" means "little lamb." His blood flowed in her veins. My daughter wants to be like Rachel Scott—a Dragon slayer. It is a gift to you when the One on the throne says to you, "Sweetheart, slay the Dragon."

On the night He was betrayed, He took bread and broke it, and He said, "This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper, having given thanks He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink of it you proclaim my death until I come again. And I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it with you in my father's kingdom. Do this in remembrance of me."

I'm not speaking in metaphors. Come to the table and slay the Dragon. In Jesus' name, thank you, Father. Amen.

Further Reading

“Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out”

-John 12:31

“ . . . concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. . . .”

-John 16:11

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

-Luke 10:17-20

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

-Colossians 2:13-15

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death,

that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

-Hebrews 2:14-16

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

-I John 2:14b

Who or what it is that the Lamb has conquered is not expressed (cf. 3:21) (though it is probable that we should see the defeat of Satan by Michael, depicted in 12:7-9, as a symbol of the Lamb's victory). The object of conquest is left undefined in chapter 5 so that the victory should be boundless in its scope. All that is opposed to God's rule, we are to understand, has been defeated by the Lamb. . . . The continuing and ultimate victory of God over evil which the rest of Revelation describes is no more than the working-out of the decisive victory of the Lamb on the cross.

-Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

-Zechariah 3:1-2

“Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a

murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. . . .”

-John 8:43-44

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

-John 1:5

Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy! For he is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it. If we seek this, we shall put him out of reckoning.

-J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

The darkness knows neither the light nor itself; only the light knows itself and the darkness also.

-George McDonald, *Lilith*

Then an experience that perhaps no good man can ever have in our world came over him--a torrent of perfectly unmingled and lawful hatred. The energy of hating, never before felt without some guilt, without some dim knowledge that he was failing fully to distinguish the sinner from the sin, rose into his arms and legs till he felt that they were pillars of burning blood. What was before him appeared no longer a creature of corrupted will. It was corruption itself to which will was attached only as an instrument. Ages ago it had been a Person: but the ruins of personality now survived in it only as weapons at the disposal of furious self-

exiled negation. It is perhaps difficult to understand why this filled Ransom not with horror but with a kind of joy. The joy came from finding at last what hatred was made for. As a boy with an axe rejoices on finding a tree, or a boy with a box of coloured chalks rejoices on finding a pile of perfectly white paper, so he rejoiced in the perfect congruity between his emotion and its object.

-C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*

What chilled and . . . cowed him was the union of malice with something nearly childish. For temptation, for blasphemy, for a whole battery of horrors, he was in some sort prepared: but hardly for this petty, indefatigable nagging as of a nasty little boy at a preparatory school. Indeed no imagined horror could have surpassed the sense which grew within him as the slow hours passed, that this creature was, by all human standards, inside out—it's heart on the surface and its shallowness at the heart. On the surface, great designs and an antagonism to Heaven which involved the fate of worlds: but deep within, when every veil had been pierced, was there, after all, nothing but a black puerility, an aimless empty spitefulness content to sate itself with the tiniest cruelties, as love does not disdain the smallest kindness?

-C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*

We know from his [Milton's] prose works that he believed everything detestable to be, in the long run, also ridiculous; and mere Christianity commits every Christian to believing that "the Devil is (in the long run) an ass." . . . What we see in Satan is the horrible co-existence of a subtle and incessant intellectual activity with an incapacity to understand anything. This doom he has brought upon himself; in order to avoid seeing one thing he has, almost voluntarily, incapacitated himself from seeing at all. And thus,

throughout the poem, all his torments come, in a sense, at his own bidding, and the Divine judgement might have been expressed in the words “thy will be done.” He says “Evil be thou my good” (which includes “Nonsense be thou my sense”) and his prayer is granted.

-C. S. Lewis, Preface to *Paradise Lost*

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

-James 4:7

Politics and Religion

The Dragon's Two Beasts

(Revelation 13-14:1)

Two weeks ago we preached on the Ancient Serpent, the Dragon. At the end of chapter twelve, the Dragon is frustrated with his inability to get to the woman and her offspring, the Church.

Revelation 12:17: “And he stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads.”

REVELATION 13:1-6: *And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder. Men worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"*

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months; it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

In chapter seventeen, an angel shows up and tells John, “The waters you saw are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.” He also tells John that the ten horns are ten kings that have not yet received royal power. The seven heads are seven mountains or seven hills upon which the Whore of Babylon sits. You’ll remember that Rome is “the city on seven hills.”

The angel also tells John the seven heads are seven kings. Five of these kings have already fallen, one is, and one is yet to come. That means the Beast is alive and kicking at the time of the Revelation.

The angel also reveals that the Beast that was and is not is actually an eighth head, yet the whole Beast was and is not and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit. It seems that this Beast just won’t die and stay dead. It can’t be killed by normal means.

At the time of the Revelation, the emperor Nero, who was the fifth emperor of Rome, had recently died through a self-inflicted head wound. The myth that circulated in the Empire was that he would be back.

Whatever the case, when Nero did die in 68 A.D., there was mass confusion, civil unrest, and three suitors for the throne. It appeared that the Empire was doomed . . . until it almost miraculously revived in 69 A.D. through Emperor Vespasian. And the peoples of the world were in awe at its resilience. In wonder they would say, “Who can fight against it?”

People argue about the exact identity of the heads and the horns. But it’s obvious, if you study scripture, that the Beast *at least* refers to Babylon, Persia, and Greece . . . the lion, the bear, and the leopard . . . who rise out of the sea in Daniel 7. There is also a fourth beast in Daniel 7 that has ten horns, and it appears to be Rome.

At the end of the chapter, these four beasts are defeated by one like the “Son of Man” coming on the

clouds, the “Ancient of Days.” Yet the saints will suffer for “time, times, and half a time”—forty-two months. The four beasts also take the form of a large statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2. Babylon is the head, and it seems that Persia is the chest, Greece is the loins, and Rome is the legs and ten toes.

In the dream, an incredible thing happens: A rock “not hewn with human hands” crashes into the toes of the statue! The statue crumbles, and the rock grows and grows into a great mountain until it fills the entire world! It’s an *eternal kingdom*.

We know who that rock is — the Ancient of Days, the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus.

It would then seem that the Beast is at least the energy or spirit behind governments that war upon the people of God and exalt themselves above God and His Christ in blasphemy. They were governments like Babylon and Medo-Persia and Greece, in the past persecuting Israel, and at the time of the Revelation, Rome persecuting the Church. And at the time of the Revelation there were ten kings and a head still to come. Behind them all is the seven-headed Dragon.

In the words of Paul, “We battle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). In the words of John, “We battle against the beast from the sea.”

In 1950, the great Dutch theologian Hendrik Berkhof wrote a seminal book entitled *Christ and the Powers*. In it he argued that Paul saw the principalities and powers as “structures of earthly, human existence,” “social facts,” “ideologies,” and “nations.” These principalities and powers were created *by* God, but like humanity, they had fallen.

What was designed to be good became corrupt or

inhabited by evil, so Paul writes that “governing authorities are instituted by God to bear the sword for the public good” (Romans 13). However, it’s clear that they are fallen . . . and may be inhabited with evil.

Whatever you think about all of that, it’s clear that evil is organized. It works through governments and institutions and peoples, what John calls “the world,” as opposed to “the earth,” which swallows the lies of the Dragon.

I John 5:19: “We are of God, but the whole world is in the power of the evil one.” The *whole world*. Yet Revelation 1:5 says, “Jesus is the ruler of the kings on earth.”

Everything the Beast does is allowed or granted to him. The Beast is allowed to blaspheme the name of God and His dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven, that is, *us*—the Church.

Rome was the Beast that blasphemed those seven churches in Asia Minor. And Rome was the Beast that crucified Jesus. A Roman soldier thrust a spear in His side, and the *whole world* was amazed at the power of Rome. *I’ve* been amazed at the power of Rome! Haven’t you looked back in history and thought, “How on earth did they rule such a vast empire?” The Beast . . . the Dragon, according to John. Now Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome . . . these empires are long gone.

So where’s the seven-headed Beast *today*? — Because we still battle against the world rulers of this present darkness.

John wrote, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.”

Well, where *is* he now?

I just read an amazing little book entitled *Marx and Satan* in which Richard Wurmbrand makes some fascinating connections between Satanism and people like Joseph Stalin, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx. Historians will argue about Marx's involvement with Satanism, but it's hard to argue with the hundreds of millions of dead bodies strewn across the twentieth century.

Communism's greatest fury *is* against the Church. It's pretty clear Marx was *not* an atheist. He was a God-hater.

And Hitler was a God-hater, a mass murderer of the Jews, and a violent persecutor of the Church—the Israel of God. It's well known that Hitler was very involved in the occult . . . the worship of Odin, the Thule society, Satanic rituals . . .

In 1973, historian Trevor Ravenscroft wrote a book entitled *The Spear of Destiny*. The spear is supposedly the lance which the Roman soldier stuck in Christ's side as He hung dead on the cross. There are all sorts of legends surrounding this spear, involving rulers like Alaric (who sacked Rome), Charlemagne, and Napoleon. The legend was that whoever possessed the spear would be able to conquer the world.

On March 14, 1938, Hitler annexed Austria and obtained all the relics in the Hoffburg Museum. He ordered that the spear be brought to Germany. In 1944, he placed it in an underground vault. On April 30, 1945, at 2:10 p.m. American forces took possession of that vault and the spear. Eighty minutes later Hitler killed himself in a bunker in Berlin. (Suicide like Nero.)

Hitler spoke of the day he first saw the spear in a museum in Austria:

I stood there quietly gazing upon it for several minutes quite oblivious to the scene around me. It seemed to carry some hidden

inner meaning which evaded me, a meaning which I felt I inwardly knew yet could not bring to consciousness . . . I felt as though I myself had held it before in some earlier century of history. That I myself had once claimed it as my talisman of power and held the destiny of the world in my hands . . .

That's a freaky, weird story. But maybe Hitler *was* like a horn on that horrific Beast. Historians will argue about Hitler's involvement with Satanism, but it's hard to argue with six million systematically mutilated and tortured corpses!

Nazism is mostly dead. And Communism is greatly weakened. But the Dragon and the Beast are still working. Where? — Some may say the radical homosexual agenda in Washington. And it makes you pause to think that something like at least 30 million babies (that's what we call them if we *want* them; “fetuses” if we *don't* want them) have been murdered or aborted in our nation since Roe vs. Wade. But maybe that's too subtle . . .

In Indonesia, as we speak, Islamic Fundamentalists are waging a “jihad”—slaughter—holy war—against Christians on the islands of Sulawesi and Maluku. I read in the paper this morning about the Christians in Afghanistan who are facing execution. In Sudan, Arabs are crucifying Christian fathers and raping and force circumcising Christian mothers, taking their children and selling them into slavery. Thousands upon thousands . . . and it's barely even reported in the western press.

What are we going to do about it?

This past week a friend came into my office and wanted to talk to me about Sudan, just to make sure I knew

about some of the things going on there. Then we asked the question, “What can we do about it?”

We talked about pressure on the government. That would be good, because the U.S. military could utterly obliterate Sudan. But we don’t. (Maybe there is not enough oil there, like in Kuwait and Iraq.)

We talked about the confusing politics and the role of government and carrying the sword. We wondered, “How can *we* conquer? What can *we* do?” And I thought of an answer . . . I think it’s the right answer . . . but I was afraid to say it.

How *do* we conquer the Beast?

REVELATION 13:7-10: *[The beast] was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. If any one has an ear, let him hear: If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

“If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes.” That’s destiny, and it’s Jeremiah 15:2. “If anyone slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.” That’s Jesus in Matthew 26:52 when He said to Peter on the night He was taken off to be crucified, “Put away your sword. For he who lives by the sword will die by the sword.”

Then there's a call for "endurance and faith." It's like a warning: "Beware of what this Beast can do to you." "Beware when fighting the dragon lest you become the dragon," writes Nietzsche, of all people.

REVELATION 13:11: *Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.*

This second beast comes from the earth or land, a word that is often used to refer to Israel. In Genesis 1:1, God forms the land from the chaotic sea. You see, the Dragon is emulating the One on the throne. The first beast fakes death and resurrection; the Dragon and the two beasts are like a mock Trinity. "Antichrist" doesn't simply mean "opposite Christ" but "imitation Christ"— "mock Christ."

Now this land beast looks like a sacrificial lamb. But it talks like a dragon.

REVELATION 13:12-18: *It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It works great [amazing] signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast should even speak, and to*

cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

(We don't know if "amazing signs" is trickery or demonic powers.)

Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

A "human number" would imply that the other numbers in Revelation are not merely human . . . like 42 and 7 and $3\frac{1}{2}$. But *this* number we are invited to calculate. It was common in that day to do this. There's a wall in Pompeii where you can see graffiti on the wall: "I love her whose number is 545."

In that day, every letter in the alphabet was assigned a numeric value and then added together to get the number of the name. "666" is the number, but some ancient manuscripts record "616." Emperor Nero's name is spelled two ways. In Hebrew, one way adds up to 666; the other way adds up to 616.

Emperor Nero took Christians and rolled them in pitch, tied them to poles, and set them on fire as human torches in the coliseum at night so he could drink and watch as other Christians, sown in animal skins, were torn apart by wild dogs.

After Nero killed himself with a fatal wound to the

head, the Empire revived, and Domitian continued the persecutions, but only worse. Persecutions were inflicted on those who wouldn't bow down in worship before statues or images of Caesar.

The Jews were officially exempt (they were an official religion), but they would often betray Christians and hand them over to the Roman Concilia, who enforced the cult of the Emperor. It was especially strong in Asia Minor. Those who wouldn't worship the Emperor were often excluded from buying and selling, and they often faced death.

However, their names were written in a book, and they were sealed and marked by God for resurrection, just as the others who bowed down were marked with the Beast for destruction.

Now, if you are one of those who likes the Hollywood version of the story, and you're worried about my interpretation, let me say, I don't know the future. So I don't *know* what will happen in the future. Prophecies can have many fulfillments. So if one day someone comes up to you and asks, "Hey, dude, can I tattoo the number 666 on your hand or forehead?" . . . *walk away*. Just say *no!*

I really hope it's that obvious. But I'm afraid the Dragon is probably more subtle than that. I believe the first Beast is evil politics throughout history, and the second Beast is evil religion. Don't compromise; don't receive their mark. The 666 really is a human number. It is *six*, the number of fallen, incomplete humanity, three times over.

So how do we know this Beast? — It's marked with fallen humanity. It looks like religion, it looks like a lamb . . . but listen very closely. All the talk is psychology, sociology, and business. It's all human striving and power and pride, and that's blasphemy and evil.

Human politics and human religion together are *lethal*.

In Germany, they worshiped Hitler. And Communism is more than politics; it's a religion. Did you know that historically one of the most viable candidates for Beast and antichrist has been the visible Church and the Pope?

In the Middle Ages, the Pope was politics and religion, and all his talk was power. He was seated in Rome on the Seven Hills, and many were entirely immoral and corrupt. They enforced religion with power. In the Inquisition, thousands were systematically tortured and burned at the stake. They ordered the crusades against the Muslims . . . Islam in Palestine . . . even Sudan. "Beware when fighting the dragon lest you become the dragon."

Well, what *about* Islam? How *do* we conquer?

In verse seven, the Beast is allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them. It reminds me of something John recorded, that our Lord Jesus, absolutely drenched in blood and crowned with thorns, stood before the Roman governor Pilate. He said, "You would have no power over me unless it had been granted you from above." He had already said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight."

This so unnerved Pilate that he sought to release Jesus. He said to the mob, "Behold, your king." And the chief priests who presided over the sacrificial lambs each day in the temple, the chief priests of the land of Israel, the chief priests who had so ardently fought against the Roman Beast, cried out before the mob, "We have no king but Caesar!" Caesar—the Beast.

"Beware when fighting the dragon lest you become the dragon."

And so it was that the religious leaders of Israel delivered Jesus to the Roman Beast, just as the synagogues

in Asia delivered Christians to the Roman Concilia. Satan, who had so earnestly desired this, delighted as the Beast strung Christ up on that cross, and it was a Roman soldier who thrust a spear in His side.

REVELATION 14:1: *Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*

Jesus conquered by being conquered; He conquered with sacrificial love. *We* conquer with “the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony, loving not our lives even unto death.”

So my friend and I sat together there in my office for a while. Having just read Revelation 13 and wondering what we can do about Sudan and how we can conquer, I finally said something like this:

Well, I guess maybe we could pray that God (and it would need to be *God* calling people to this) would raise up 2,000 or 3,000 white, upper middle class, American folks who would leave here and go to Sudan . . . sneak across the border . . . that is, leave Laodicea and just go *sit* with their brothers and sisters in Smyrna . . . leave America and just go *sit* with their brothers and sisters in Sudan. And if the Arabs came down on them in a fury and crucified 2,000 or 3,000 white, upper middle class Americans in the desert, things would *change!* I imagine heads would roll at the UN. The U.S. military would be put on “Red Alert.” I bet the slave trade would stop.

But far, far more powerful than that, the Gospel would be proclaimed. And Satanic lies placed in the hearts of Muslims dating back to the crusades when the Church became the Beast . . . those lies might be *broken*. The rider on the white horse would ride out, and we would conquer not just governments but human hearts.

Well, that's just a crazy thought . . . But that *is* how our Lord "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in Christ."

I've come to believe that John 12:31 is the key to understanding the Revelation: "*Now* is the judgment of this world, *now* shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I when I am lifted up from the land will draw all men to myself," and He spoke of His crucifixion.

The word "draw" is probably best translated "romance." "I will *romance* all men to myself." You romance a lover because that's the only way you can get their heart to surrender in freedom, the freedom of love. There is no greater power.

The Beast and the Dragon thought they held Christ to that cross with the power of iron nails, but they did not! Iron nails, Beast, and Dragon were only the means purposed before the foundation of the world. Nails, Beast, and Dragon *cannot* pin the Son of God to wood. They are not *powerful* enough. Only His own relentless love could ever do a thing like that.

Believe me, one day very soon, when this world of illusions and lies is finally burned away, we will see beyond a shadow of a doubt that nothing is more real or powerful than love. "For God *is* love," said John.

Even now every time you pick up a cross in love, the Enemy is exposed and his lies are disarmed. Human striving,

the quest for power, the survival of the fittest, the race struggle of Nazism, the class struggle of Communism, and the self-righteous legalism of Islam is exposed as *not* the deepest truth. It's *not* all that is. It infuriates the Dragon, and it overcomes the world. It's the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I want to leave you with a few simple things and this practical point: We conquer not with power of human politics and religion; we conquer with the power of God's romance — the cross, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. So beware, my religious friends, when fighting the Dragon, lest you become the Dragon.

Instead of marching against the radical homosexual agenda in Washington, we support HIV CareLink and Mike Tucker in our church. We love homosexuals with AIDS, and if in the process we contract the disease and die, we conquer.

I definitely vote against abortion, for government is charged with protecting innocent lives. Government *can* protect biology, but it can never conquer a heart. So vote. But I hope we really get behind crisis pregnancy centers, hold babies in our arms, and minister the gospel of love to mothers who have been through the tragedy of abortion.

I'm not saying politics and organized religion have no *place*, I'm just saying they have no *power* . . . no *real power* . . . no power to conquer the world. But on Hitler's birthday, when Rachel Scott was shot in the head by Eric Harris, the Beast conquered Rachel, but Rachel Scott conquered the world.

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer returned to Germany to die with his brothers there, conquered by the Beast Bonhoeffer conquered the world.

Remember the report from Maluku, Indonesia? As Christians were being killed there folks kept seeing a rider on a white horse. We wonder what He's doing. He's

conquering the world!

Sudan, Indonesia, Columbine — conquered by the Beast, they conquer the world. Kiss the hands of an AIDS patient in the name of Jesus, hold an unwanted baby in the name of Jesus, mow your grumpy neighbor's lawn in sacrificial love in the name of Jesus, and you conquer the world. "This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (I John 5:3).

And get this: It was precisely when the Dragon inspired the Beast from the land and the Beast from the sea, when the high priest in the land delivered Jesus to the Roman governor from over the sea, precisely when God allowed the two Beasts to conquer Christ by nailing Him to the cross (and Christ humbled Himself even unto death) . . . it was precisely then that our Lord conquered the world.

And it was also then that a Roman soldier stood in front of the cross and looked at the "glory of God shining in the face of Christ." I would like to think that *he* was the one holding that spear of destiny and that he was the *first* to say, "Surely this was the Son of God."

At that moment that incredible rock "not hewn with hands" *crashed* into the Roman Empire, and it began to fall! And the kingdoms of this world began to crumble. And that rock in Nebuchadnezzar's dream began to grow into a great mountain. It's growing still, right here and right now. It is an *eternal kingdom*, and it cannot be stopped!

It is tragic that Hitler did not know it *was* a spear of destiny. But all destiny is God's destiny. "And this was the plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ and through him to reconcile all things to himself."

So we conquer by *being* conquered with and in love. And holding the lance, that Roman soldier was conquered by Jesus as Jesus conquered the world. Jesus gives the world to us (and that soldier) brand new.

Joseph Tson was a pastor in Communist Romania. They brought him in to the Secret Police and told him to stop preaching or they would kill him. He said, "If you kill me my sermons will be all over the country, and they know who I am."

Then he looked the Secret Police captain in the eye and said, "You know, sir, your supreme weapon is killing; *my* supreme weapon is dying." And they didn't know what to do with him, so they let him go! He was free, not only politically, but free in every possible way.

So, in the name of Jesus, children of God, *be free*. For He has overcome the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Further Reading

In the first year of Belshaz'zar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, and told the sum of the matter. Daniel said, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand upon two feet like a man; and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side; it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' After this I looked, and lo, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back; and the beast had four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat; his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened."

-Daniel 7:1-10

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

-Revelation 13:1-2

I stood there quietly gazing upon it for several minutes quite oblivious to the scene around me. It seemed to carry some hidden inner meaning which evaded me, a meaning which I felt I inwardly knew yet could not bring to consciousness...I felt as though I myself had held it before in some earlier century of history. That I myself had once claimed it as my talisman of power and held the destiny of the world in my hands..."

-Adolph Hitler, supposedly standing before
the "Spear of Destiny"

The hellish vapors rise and fill the brain,
Till I go mad and my heart is utterly changed.
See this sword?
The prince of darkness
Sold it to me.
For me he beats the time and gives the signs.
Ever more boldly I play the dance of death.

-Karl Marx, *Spielmann (The Player)* as quoted in
Marx and Satan by Richard Wurmbrand

By the cross . . . Christ abolished the slavery which, as a result of sin, lay over our existence as a menace and an accusation. On the cross He "disarmed" the Powers, "made a public example of them and thereby triumphed over

them.” . . . He made a public example of them. It is precisely in the crucifixion that the true nature of the Powers has come to light. Previously they were accepted as the most basic and ultimate realities, as the gods of the world. Never had it been perceived, nor could it have been perceived, that this belief was founded on deception. . . . The Pharisees, personifying piety, crucified Him in the name of piety. Pilate, representing Roman justice and law, shows what these are worth when called upon to do justice to the Truth Himself. Obviously, “none of the rulers of this age,” who let themselves be worshipped as divinities, understood God’s wisdom, “for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Cor. 2:8). Now they are unmasked as false gods by their encounter with Very God; they are made a public spectacle. Thus Christ has “triumphed over them.” The unmasking is actually already their defeat.

-Hendrik Berkhof

Beware when fighting the dragon lest you become the dragon.

-Friedrich Nietzsche

His objective is to persuade people not to believe in him or, failing that, to focus attention on his agenda, diverting our attention from God’s agenda and his more important objectives. Worst of all, Satan prefers us to marry God’s agenda with his tactics. It is Satan’s ultimate victory. . . . Two decades after conservative Christians charged into the political arena, bringing new voters and millions of dollars with them in hopes of transforming the culture through political power, it must now be acknowledged that we have failed. . . . The aphrodisiac of political power descended on Lynchburg, Virginia, with the impact of an asteroid. Politics was a better means to noble ends than the hard and often

invisible efforts mandated by Scripture. Who wanted to ride into the capital on the back of an ass when one could go first class in a private jet and be picked up and driven around in a chauffeured limousine?

-Cal Thomas, *Blinded by Night*

But as long as this world lasts and Christ's Church is in it, it is to be a militant Church. Although it has the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, woe to the Christian Church when it is triumphant in this world, for then it is not the Church that has triumphed but the world. . . . Did he not come into the world in order to suffer; is not *that* what he called being triumphant?

-Soren Kierkegaard

Collaboration with power, whether Communist or not, is always ruinous for the church. If the church exists, if it is to have legitimacy in the eyes of the people, it must always stand erect as a counter-power to political power.

-Jacques Ellul

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. . . ."

-Matthew 26:52

As historian Garry Wills says, the first nation to separate Christianity from government produced perhaps the most religious nation on earth.

-Philip Yancey

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

-John 12:32

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth--that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of him shall be broken." And again another scripture says, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced."

-John 19:32-37

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrim'mon in the plain of Megid'do. The land shall mourn, each family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shim'e-ites by itself, and their wives by themselves; and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves. On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. . . ."

-Zechariah 12:10-13:1

And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son

of God!”

-Mark 15:39

Revelation on TV
And the Bride Sings of Home
(Revelation 14:1-13a)

Last week we preached on Revelation 13. We preached that the Beast from the sea and the Beast from the land are idolatrous politics and religion. They are principalities and powers, evil that somehow inhabits and uses the systems and administrations of this world.

We preached that at the time of the Revelation, the Beast from the sea took the form of the Roman Empire. And the Beast from the land took the form of the Roman Concilia (the counsel that enforced emperor worship) and also the form of the chief priests of Israel who crucified Christ.

These two beasts, idolatrous politics and idolatrous religion, together are especially lethal.

Gary Wills wrote of the United States, “The first nation to separate Christianity from government produced perhaps the most religious nation on earth.” That’s a pretty fascinating statement, and perhaps it means that we have done better as a country battling those two beasts than most any other country in history.

Last week we asked, “Where’s the Beast today?” We talked about Hitler and the Nazis; we talked about Marx and Communism. America did very well, it seems to me, against those beasts. The American government wielded the sword with a wisdom and restraint far greater than other countries. We didn’t *occupy* their land.

The American Church didn’t rely on power so much as preached the Gospel, it seems to me. And even the American economy blessed its enemies . . . with the Marshall Plan, for instance. And now Japan is our ally. Now those two beasts of Nazism and Communism are mostly gone or

dying.

Then last week we talked about Islam, Afghanistan, and Indonesia. We talked about the atrocities in the Sudan where, according to some accounts, 6 million have already been slaughtered, many of them crucified in the deserts of Sudan by Islamic fundamentalists.

The American government could probably *do* something if we weren't too concerned about the economics of oil. We could probably *do* something, but not as much as you think. Governments can keep people breathing a few more years in this fallen world, but governments cannot keep *anybody* out of Hell.

However, last week we preached that the American Church just might be able to do something immense and eternal . . . sacrificially love Sudan . . . maybe even some folks crucified in the deserts of Sudan with their brothers and sisters in the Church there . . . and things would change. For we hold the power of God, the romance of God, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We conquer by being conquered in and with love.

Last Tuesday morning as I was getting dressed, I thought maybe all this talk of Revelation and the Beast and Islam was just too far away and too unreal. So I thought *this* week I'd just bring it home . . . talk about how we're not only to die as martyrs in places like Sudan, but in places like your marriage . . . and your budget . . . and what videos you do and don't bring home from your local Blockbuster. That is, every time you're obedient in faith to Jesus, you die to sin and you die to this world.

I thought maybe I'd bring it home, because the Revelation can just seem so unreal, apocalyptic, distant, and irrelevant. That was Tuesday morning right before my sister Lydia called and said, "Peter and Susan, you ought to turn on your TV." When I turned it on, I saw what you saw.

One of the World Trade Center towers was billowing with smoke, a huge, gaping wound in the side.

Then another airplane; then another tower on fire; then a report that one of the towers had fallen. Then, all at once, before my eyes on live TV, I saw the other tower crumble all the way to the ground. Then the picture that I don't think I'll ever forget: There seated on the water was Lady Liberty, holding her torch, facing the east, as if beckoning, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses longing to breathe free." Lady Liberty, and behind her the great city, the United Nations, Wall Street . . . the great city billowing with fire and smoke, the World Trade Center fallen to the ground.

At that point, the Revelation seemed *relevant*. And as I began to read it, it was so relevant it just about took my breath away. God is telling His story—telling *history*.

I need to tell you that I don't think I'd preach this sermon this morning if I were in New York. And it's going to be hard here, because *so many* stories are happening at once. So many stories, so many emotions, but Jesus is *in* every story.

So if you came here this morning overwhelmed with sorrow over a particular story . . . someone you knew in New York, a child that will go to bed weeping tonight because he won't see his mom or dad again in this world, lovers that won't kiss again . . . if you're overwhelmed with sorrow, I need to remind you: Jesus is in New York.

He's in New York right now, suffering and weeping and conquering. I praise Him that He loves New York and every fatherless child in that city far more than I am even able to begin to comprehend. And in every person, He's telling *His* story of love for them. Each one of those stories is utterly unique, and I, Peter Hiett, *do not know it*.

He's also telling a story of governments, empires, principalities, and powers . . . an apocalypse (a revelation) of Jesus conquering the world. Since we're in Denver and not in New York, and since we're preaching through the Revelation, I think we need to start asking the question

“What does it mean?” And if your sorrow has given way to anger, we had better ask, “What does it mean?”

This week I was angry. I really believe that the United States of America is the greatest nation that this world has ever seen.

I love my country. There is no other country in which I would rather live.

I love my government and it's military. I'll never forget a moment in Romania when my previously tortured and persecuted friend Peter Dugulescu rolled up his shirtsleeve and showed me his scars. He said, “Brother Peter, if it wasn't for pressure from your government on mine, I would be dead.”

I love free market capitalism. I think it is the most godly system. Its roots are in John Calvin, reformed theology, and the Bible. It takes the image of God seriously and allows us to love people and love God with our resources, like they did in Acts 2 when they sold everything and shared all that they had in common, not because they *had* to, but because they wanted to.

I love liberty. I've spent time overseas, and I know that freedom comes with a price. I know this sounds strange to you if you haven't traveled much, but even my freedom to choose soft drinks at 7-11 is an ideal that has its roots in the Gospel of Christ and is paid for with blood.

I love America, and I love George Bush. I'm thrilled that he called a Day of Prayer and quoted scripture, and with him I long for justice and judgment. “Make no mistake. The U.S. will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.”

So I felt *angry*. As one expert in terrorism put it, “This struck at the heart of America, our military power, and our economic power.” *Angry*. And I have wanted to *conquer* the *Beast*.

Revelation 13:7: “[The Beast] was allowed to make

war on the saints and to conquer them.”

Revelation 13:10: “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.”

Sometimes Scripture is just too stinkin’ *relevant*. We’d rather listen to illusion, to CNN. But where are you going to get your meaning this week? CNN or Jesus? They *do not* sing the same song.

REVELATION 14:1-5: *Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless.*

- They *conquer* by being conquered in love.
- They conquer the Ancient Dragon while being conquered by his Beast.
- They conquer by the “blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony, loving not their lives even unto

death.”

- They conquer by following the Lamb wherever He goes. He goes to a cross.
- They conquer, and they are us.

We are like “first fruits redeemed from the earth” (James 1:18). We are the Church militant: 144,000 sealed servants of God, the Israel of God, 12 tribes x 12 divisions, each soldier devoted to war so figuratively celibate like the ancient Israelites. (That’s why Uriah would not sleep with Bathsheba.)

But most importantly, we are undefiled by idolatry. In scripture, idolatry is whoredom.

We are those in Hebrews 12 who “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.”

We conquer by the blood of the Lamb. We conquer with the power of the cross, the romance of God, even dying for our very enemies.

That is last week’s sermon. And you “amen-ed” it. And it’s Jesus in Matthew 5: “Love your enemies” (and He showed us what love was), “and pray for those who persecute you.”

But my guess is many of you might prefer another scripture this morning. How about this one: “When you find the unfaithful strike off their head till you have made a great slaughter among them.” Do you like that one? It’s Muhammad . . . the Koran, Sura 47.

You see, the Dragon is trying to get you to convert. “Beware when fighting the dragon lest you become the

dragon.”

Jesus is *also* trying to get you to convert, to get *everyone* to convert. Islam has made great inroads into our country in the last thirty years largely as a response to racism upon the children of black slaves, and also as a response to consumerism, pornography, and immorality—“American Economic Idolatries.”

But today Muslims are having an identity crisis, for just like at the cross, the Beast has exposed himself in violence. Muslims are asking, “Is this what Islam leads to?” Read the Koran; the answer is yes.

They are also asking another question while they’re looking at us: “What does Christianity lead to?” If we retaliate in kind, I doubt they’ll read the Bible. They’ll just read us and say, “Well, it’s just the same old song.”

Philip Yancey faxed me a letter e-mailed to him last Wednesday. It’s from a confused and frightened Pakistani man living in the States, questioning his faith. I’ll quote just a portion:

As I have read the Koran recently and its explanations, and the life history of prophet Muhammad, I have found out that the concept of political domination by force is very prevalent in it. And the terrible tragedy that happened yesterday in this country, to me it seems the logical outcome of the teachings which tell you it’s ok to reply in kind, which says you are duty bound to enforce the will of God through warfare if necessary. I could be wrong here in my opinion but I think that’s what happens when you try to enforce God’s will in this earthly world rather than believing that your kingdom is not of this world but of the other

world.

That sounds familiar. He then laments being forced to return to Pakistan where it's illegal to convert — people die for it there. But Lady Liberty is sending him back in a year. We *know* why. It's the economics of immigration. He continues:

I can't imagine going back to Pakistan. It would be just impossible. But how would I manage to stay here in this country? Do you think there is a way? Do you think I would find loving and open-minded friends in the church?

Technically he *could be* the Bride of Christ. The Bride is hidden in the people of the world. "Beware when fighting the dragon lest you become the dragon."

Thursday night at Small Group, we were talking about all this, and my friend Mark got frustrated and said, "Well, Peter, what do you think Jesus would do if He was president?" That's a good question. And I *did* know. I said, "He'd resign." In John 6:15, the people (oppressed by the Roman Beast) come and try to take Jesus by force and make him president (king). And Jesus runs away.

It's not that Jesus could not conquer Rome with power—Satan had already tempted Him with that in the wilderness—it's that He so wanted to conquer *Romans* with *love* and crush the Dragon. So He rode into Jerusalem, the great city, as a king in order to hang on a cross.

Let me rephrase the question. "What should the president do?" My honest answer is, "I don't know." I'm glad he names Jesus as his Lord. But I don't know.

I suppose he should "wield the sword out of faithful obedience to God," just like a policeman or a security guard.

That's the role of government in Romans 13. It's the role of protecting people's physical well-being.

Presidents can do that, a bit. But a guy named George who loves Jesus . . . he can do *so much more*. He can go on national TV and weep for New Yorkers and children in Afghanistan. He can weep like Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem before it killed Him. He can sing a different song.

I love our government; I just can't kid myself that it can preach the Gospel with guns, as if the kingdom were a kingdom of *this world*. In Revelation 14, the 144,000 unharmed, slaughtered saints of God—the army of God—sing a different song on Mount Zion.

REVELATION 14:6-7: *Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water."*

"The U.S. will hunt down and punish those responsible."

Well, we may incarcerate, and we may kill the perpetrators, but "those responsible"? Have you read where Osama bin Laden got his training? — the CIA in Afghanistan, where they were teaching him to fight the Dragon, the Communist Beast.

Do you really want to trace financial responsibility? Do you know where he got his 300 million dollars? — From Americans buying gas. I'm just saying that vengeance is not so easy to dispense. And if we try, the quest for "those

responsible” will take us right to our own living rooms and all the way back to a garden and a snake. And we will end up condemning our own mother—our species—in Hell. *Hell* . . . unless we hear the Gospel song, the “hour of His judgment.”

What you do with Jesus on *that* cross is *your* judgment.

John 12: “*Now* is the judgment of this world.” If you trust judgment to Christ and believe He bore your judgment *for* you, if you believe His forgiveness and likewise forgive, you will go to Heaven. If *not*, you can dispense justice, and you can bear judgment; you can go to Hell. Next verse . . .

REVELATION 14:8-13a: *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion.”*

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

That's *you*. This isn't just about some weird, bizarre Israelite army somewhere off in the distant future; it's about *you*; it's about *us* . . . right now.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth."

"Happy," "blessed" . . . they are the conquering, conquered saints singing with Jesus on Mount Zion. And it's not just a picture of "pie in the sky by and by"; heaven invades *now* in Christ by faith. "We have come to Mount Zion" (Hebrews 12). These are suffering saints dying with Christ even now.

So how can they sing like that when the world lies in ruin? Fearless, as if no terrorist act could ever terrorize them? As if there is nothing in this world that could harm them?

In verse eight, an angel flies through declaring, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. She made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion." Her fall isn't described until chapter eighteen, but maybe she's already fallen in the hearts of these singing saints. So she no longer has any more power over them, "in this world, but not of this world."

It's strange . . . We Americans love to talk and write about the Beast and the Antichrist, yet we hardly ever mention the great Whore. She takes up more space in the book. She's another one of these "principalities and powers," like the Beast. In fact, in chapter seventeen we find she *sits* on the Beast or political power. "All the kings of the earth have fornicated with her, and all the peoples of the world are drunk with the wine of that fornication."

It becomes clear that the Whore, here in the Revelation, is the economy and culture of Rome. The angel

tells John she is the “great city” which has dominion “over the kings of the earth.” She is Rome but also Babylon and Egypt and Sodom. She is the global economy that thrives under an empire due to free trade. The kings of the earth *hate* her because of her power over them. But they’re in bed with her, for they want her pleasures. She is world economy.

But an economy isn’t necessarily corrupt. There is another economy in the Revelation as well, the economy of the New Jerusalem, which is the people of God and also the great Bride of Christ.

As a husband, you are to give your life (your seed) to your bride in order to bear fruit (life). But Satan tempts you to give your seed (your life) to whores in order to bear death. In Revelation, the kings of the earth are playing the Whore rather than loving the Bride.

Men lust after whores, sleep with them, and then hate them and hate themselves. Men lust after idols, worship them, and then destroy them and destroy themselves. Men turn the economy into an idol, go to bed with it, become enslaved to it, and then they hate it and it kills them.

The Beast and the kings fornicate with the Whore, and then in Revelation 17:16, they hate the Whore . . . desolate the Whore . . . burn her with fire. Satan’s kingdom devours itself.

So the Whore of Babylon appears to be an idolatrous world economy. In Revelation, she’s pictured as the goddess Roma or Cybelle, seated on the waters and Seven Hills. Not the “Great Mother” goddess but the “mother of whores and earth’s abominations,” and the merchants (traders) of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness.

If she were around today where would she be? We asked that about the Beast last week. If she were around today . . .

- I bet she’d *try* to be seated in the world’s richest

economy and most influential city.

- I bet the nations would be united around her, addicted to her intoxications (dependent on her), yet deeply resenting her.
- I bet she'd sell her goods with blasphemies, promising cars could save your soul and blue jeans could give you an identity.
- I bet she'd be the leading producer and distributor of pornography worldwide—whoredom.
- I bet she'd consume the vast majority of the world's resources, rich and fat while the world starves.
- I bet she'd be defended by people that preach free trade (which is good), but they'd use their freedom as a license for evil. And even though freedom would be the song, it would be idolatrous freedom, placed above God who is love. So human life would no longer be sacred, and it wouldn't surprise me if much of her wealth had been built on the backs of slaves (Revelation 18:13).

Sometimes I think we Americans are pretty stupid to worry about the Beast. The odds, *even now*, of your being killed in a terrorist attack are remarkably slim. But maybe we ought to be a bit on guard against the Whore and what she's up to. She's seductive, and in Revelation 18: 4, the people of God are seduced by her.

If I was a Palestinian Arab Christian kid (which I'm not, but *if*), and I was living in the West Bank last Tuesday and reading the Revelation, I think I'd see Osama bin Laden as

the Beast in bed with the Whore, dependent on the Whore for his 300 million, yet hating the Whore . . .

Then I wouldn't help but notice the Beast flew his planes right into the World Trade Center next to Wall Street and the United Nations . . .

I'd watch them fall and burn behind a statue of a woman holding a torch, which I'd learn was a gift from France, reminiscent of the Goddess of Reason from the French Revolution and Republic, and also patterned after the Mother Goddess by Augustus Bartholdi, its sculptor. (Seven horns are the seven seas and the torch symbolizes enlightenment.)

I must confess that as a poor, oppressed, Palestinian kid, I'd be tempted to . . . *dance* . . . not because American children, mothers, and fathers lay dying—they would be abstractions to me at that point—but because the Whore had fallen. I'd be tempted to dance, kind of like you were tempted to dance at the end of the Persian Gulf War . . . not because Iraqi children, moms, and dads were burning in the desert—at that point they were abstractions to you—but because the Beast had been mortally wounded.

Listen closely: I *did not say* the Statue of Liberty is the Whore of Babylon. Idols only have power if you idolize them. So don't get hung up on trivialities. (If you want, we can take a fire hose, baptize her, and call her the Church holding the light of Christ.)

But understand this: Our statue of liberty is not a woman holding a torch of enlightenment beckoning "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses." That is an idol. No government, no religious system, no economy can give you liberty. Our statue of liberty is a *cross*. And the Spirit cries, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

How can the saints sing when the world is in ruins? — They're free from this world and belong to another. That's liberty; that's rest. And only God can give it to you.

And I *did not say* the World Trade Center or Wall Street or the people *in* the Trade Center were the Whore of Babylon. *Every one* of them is a priceless treasure for whom our Lord died on a cross in order to save them! Don't you slander my sermon.

And I *did not say* America is the Whore of Babylon. But I *will* say this: She *is* seduced by her and infected with her demons (Revelation 18:2).

That expert on terrorism said, "They've struck the heart of America, our military and our economy." If our military is our heart, say "hello" to the Beast! And if our economy is our heart, we have the heart of a whore. And if you turn your country into a whore, you will *bate* her. How dare you pledge allegiance to the flag before you pledge allegiance to the cross!

It's time to love America as we never have before. And what is America? To God, she's dearly beloved people. And what is her heart? God wants to give her a new heart. May her heart be Christ. And how will He give her that heart? Not through government, not through some religious program, not through the economy, but through *you*—the saints—singing the new song on Mount Zion. No one else in Heaven and on earth can sing it but you.

Your life: the song of God's grace over you.

Amazing grace: I was guilty as Hell and God bled for me.

So romance the Bride; sing the song to the Bride; tell her who she is. She's hidden in the people, the "New Jerusalem coming down." But you cannot romance the Bride, you cannot love your country, if you're in bed with the Whore.

At the fall of Babylon in chapter eighteen, a voice cries from Heaven . . . it's the voice of our Lord, and He cries, "Come out of her, my people. Come out." Do you get

the picture? In scripture, when a man goes into a woman, she gets pregnant. The voice is crying, “Stop giving your life to the Whore. Stop giving your heart to the Whore.”

Give your heart to the Bride and bear the fruit of the kingdom. Stop spending your life, your heart, your passions, your treasure on consumer idolatries! Stop consuming! Stop calling yourselves “consumers” and start calling yourselves “creators.” Love the Bride in America, Sudan, Pakistan . . .

And husbands, love *your* bride. Forsake porn. Love your children, and give them time. Romance the Bride, sing her the song of the cross, because the Whore will suck you dry and leave your soul a desert. But the Bride will be a treasure forever stored in Heaven.

So how then do the saints on Mount Zion sing while the world lies in ruin? — They belong to another world already, and it is invading this one. And no longer intoxicated by the Whore, they begin to see the beauty of the Bride. They begin to believe the furious love of the Bridegroom. Dead to this world and alive to another, they *change* this world. *They* are the ones who change the world . . . change a country.

“Consider yourself dead to sin [this world] and alive to God,” writes Paul in Romans 6:11. We are constantly being given up to death. Now listen one more time to this line from the Revelation: “Blessed [happy] are the dead who die in the Lord.”

It’s weird, but times like these force the issues.

On Tuesday afternoon, I was racked with a million emotions but surprised and ashamed of one. For in the midst of sorrow and grief, compassion and mourning, I must admit something in me felt like singing. I think I was hearing a voice from another world . . . “Come out, Peter. Come out of her.”

I ached for victims; I mourned for my own investments in Babylon—my way of life. But the Revelation was *so entirely relevant*. It was so relevant that it was like this

whole world was losing its grip on me and I was ready to go . . . *home*.

Tuesday night we came here to have church, and many of you were here. We had communion, body broken, blood shed, slain Lamb. The Lamb and the saints gathered on this mountain, and we *sang well*.

It's time to love your country.

So sing your song, the romance of God, the power of God unto salvation.

[Prayer]

Lord God, we pray for everyone . . . I was going to say "victims," but I don't know if I can use that word. Lord, they were victims of another person's evil. We are *all* victims of other people's evil, yet, Lord, none of us is without sin.

So, Lord God, we pray for everyone, especially children, Lord Jesus, who will weep tonight for their mothers and their fathers. Lord God, I pray that you would ride into their bedrooms on your white horse, you would grab hold of their hearts, and you would whisper to them that they are not fatherless.

So we pray for victims in New York and in Afghanistan and Sudan and all over the world that you so furiously love.

And, Lord Jesus, we pray for our president. I truly thank you for George Bush, because, Lord Jesus, I'm honest when I say I *don't know* what he should do. I know, Lord Jesus, that you give the sword to government for the public good, and I know, Lord Jesus, that you called soldiers to yourself in your Gospel. But, Lord Jesus, I don't know exactly what they should do. Lord Jesus, I am so thankful for this, that the president calls out to you, and *you* know. So we pray, Lord Jesus, that he would hear your voice.

And I pray, Lord Jesus, for every soldier, that *they*

would hear your voice. And, Lord Jesus, if they are called up to do battle with guns, guard their hearts from the Dragon. Even there, Lord Jesus, let them preach your Gospel, not with guns but with tears.

And, Lord Jesus, we pray for our nation, we pray for our economy, we pray for our churches, and we thank you, Lord Jesus, for all those things. But, Lord God, we pray that you would cleanse us of the Evil One's demons, and that, Lord Jesus, our economy would be used to bless the peoples of the world, as it has been so many times in the past and is doing now. But, Lord Jesus, cleanse it of its evil. And cleanse us of our evil.

In the silence now we lay our hearts before you, Lord Jesus. [Moment of silence.]

Thank you for your grace, Lord Jesus. Thank you that you forgive every sin. Thank you that you wash us with your blood. Thank you that you send your Spirit to walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your incredible grace. And thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have called us to war—*your* war. In your name, Lord Jesus, we pray.

You have come to Mount Zion, and Jesus the Lamb—the slaughtered Lamb—is in our midst. And in His name I call you to “jihad”—holy war, but not against any man, not against any woman, not against any government, not against any economy. They can *all* be redeemed!

I call you to war against the Dragon and his demons. There is *right now* an immeasurable greatness of power in you. So right now on Mount Zion sing your song, and you crush the head of that Ancient Serpent.

The trumpets are sounding, and He is coming. In Matthew 26, Jesus stood before the religious Beast Caiaphas, who was about to turn Him over to the political Beast Pilate. He looked Caiaphas in the eye and said, "Henceforth you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven." *Henceforth*. He *has* been coming, and He *is* coming. The empires of Rome, Babylon, Egypt, and Sodom are fallen long ago, and the kingdom is growing.

I pray that America will only grow stronger, but my hope is in *Him*. He *is* coming; He *is* conquering. You watch . . . it's happening even now. His kingdom is growing all over this country and all over this world. So let's not ask if God's on *our* side; let's make sure we're on *His* side.

Whatever you do, do *not* be afraid. A terrorist act has *no power* if you're not terrorized! You're the saints on Mount Zion! If you've come to His cross, nothing can harm you! You already belong to another world. And you are in this world to be a blessing to those who have not yet come home. So sing your song with great cheer. For "in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

In Jesus' name, amen.

Further Reading

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer.

-Romans 12:14-13:4

We must remember these religions are not that different. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all believe in the God of love.

-Tom Clancy on some news show
the day of the 9-11 attack

When ye encounter the infidels, strike off their heads till ye have made a great slaughter among them, and *of the rest* make fast the fetters. . . . O Prophet! make war on the infidels and hypocrites, and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their abode! and wretched the passage to it!

-Muhammad, *The Koran* (Sura XLVII and LXVI)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. . . .”

-Jesus, *The Bible* (Matthew 5:43-45)

If there is any entity to which ultimate loyalty is due, it is the nation state. . . . The charge of blasphemy, if it is ever made, is treated as a quaint anachronism; but the charge of treason, of placing another loyalty above that to the nation state, is treated as the unforgivable crime. The nation state has taken the place of God.

-Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

-Matthew 20:25-28

Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and

with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb

-Revelation 14:1-4

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

-James 1:18

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

-Hebrews 12:12, 22-24

Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion." . . . And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and

multitudes and nations and tongues. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth. After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird; for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness." Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues "

-Revelation 14:8, 17:15-18:4

He needs not fear confiscation, who has nothing to lose; nor banishment, to whom heaven is his country; nor torments, when his body can be destroyed at one blow; nor death, which is the only way to set him at liberty from sin and sorrow.

-Eusebius to Emperor Valens (4th century A.D.)

It is said that Rabbi Akiva, while his body was tortured by red hot irons for his faith, was jubilant: "Only now I can finally love God with all my heart, for none of the things of this world distract my attention from it any longer!"

-Richard Wurmbrand

Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity.

-G. K. Chesterton

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them

-Acts 16:19-25

Our whole Roman world had gone dead in its heart because it feared tragedy, took flight from suffering, and abhorred failure. In fear of tragedy we worshiped power. In fear of suffering, we worshiped security. During the rising splendor of our thousand years, we had grown cruel, practical, and sterile. We did win the whole world, but in the process, we lost our souls.

-St. Ambrose

Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision. Then he will speak to them in

his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

-Psalm 2

The Fruitful Singing Bride

And the Not-So-Grim Reaper

(Revelation 14:13-20)

Remember that Revelation is *one huge symphony*. At the start, we see seven little churches in Asia Minor called to conquer, called to good deeds.

Then we see the slaughtered Lamb sitting on the throne of God. Everything is singing! The four living creatures around the throne *never stop singing*. They sing the whole way through the book. All the creatures on earth, under the earth, and in the sea are all singing to the glory of this Lamb upon the throne.

He opens a scroll and history happens. Once it's opened, we see a woman (I believe she's the people of God) who gives birth to Jesus. The Ancient Dragon then attacks Jesus' family, the Church. Satan is defeated, but he calls up the Beast. The Beast battles the saints and conquers them.

Yet it's clear that the saints conquer by being conquered. We conquer by "the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony, loving not our lives even unto death." We conquer by living out Jesus' life in this world—sacrificial love.

All at once, the saints show up on Mount Zion singing Jesus' song. They sing a *new* song. No one else knows it or can learn it. It's *their* part in the great symphony that never stops. It's the Gospel, the romance of God, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We the Church sing it now. For we are to be dead to this world and alive to God. Dead to the Beasts, dead to the Whore of Babylon, and alive to God, joining in the great symphony even *now*. Heaven is now in faith, and Heaven is a symphony! Heaven is music!

That's interesting, because in places like Afghanistan and Iran, music is illegal.

The world feels such a need right now to point out that Christianity and Islam are basically the same thing. I think maybe that's because they're worried that we won't tolerate Muslims.

At least on the surface there is a striking difference between the two; that is, Christians *sing a lot*, and Muslims do not. In fact, many Orthodox Muslims do not sing *at all*, for it's forbidden. There's a debate in the Islamic community now about whether or not singing is a sin (that is, "singing" that is any more than chanting the Koran).

Last year on my Sabbatical, I read about half of the Koran. It's amazing to me, when I reflect on it, that in the Koran there is no music. There are no songs. There is no poetry. In Sura 26 verse 225, Muhammad writes, "It is the poets whom the erring follow." Yet the *Bible* is just *packed* with poetry (more than you know, because you read it in English). Poetry and songs and admonitions to sing . . . "rejoice always."

If my son Coleman, six years old, were born in Iran or Afghanistan, he would be dead by now. He will *not stop singing*. He sings about *everything* . . . putting on his underwear . . . walking up the stairs . . . it drives us old people nuts! "Stop singing!" He can't help it. There's so much *life* in him it flows out in a song all the time.

They are singing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. And we're singing with them right here. "We've come to Mount Zion" (Hebrews 12).

REVELATION 14:13: *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

Their deeds follow them. I think that's why a lot of people think world religions are the same. "You know, it's about good deeds that follow you." Well, what *are* good deeds? "Well *you* know . . . like courage . . . laying down your own life for the common good. Like a soldier who would lay down his own life for the good of his country. Like a guy who would fly a plane into a building and die for the good of a billion Muslims . . ."

Ouch. Hear me closely: I'm not saying the soldier (or the fireman, for that matter) and the terrorist are the same. I'm just saying that good deeds might be more than the deed you do.

The President said, "We will cleanse the world of evil. . . . We will, with Operation Infinite Justice." He called those guys who flew the planes and sacrificed their lives in order to cleanse the world of evil and bring the justice of Islam (at least in *their* minds) "cowards." That's confusing. And America is confused. Maybe we should be asking ourselves, "What makes a deed *good*?"

In verse thirteen, the voice cries out, "Their deeds follow them."

REVELATION 14:14-16: *Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. [I think that must be Jesus.] And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe."*

This other angel comes out of the temple (*we are* the temple) and bosses Jesus around. Who could this be? I think

maybe it's the Holy Spirit calling from our hearts, "Come and get it, Jesus. They're ripe."

"So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped."

- Matthew 24: "Henceforth you will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven." What's He doing? — reaping.
- In John 4:35, Jesus says, "Lift your eyes; the fields are white, ripe for harvest." They are ripe *right now*.
- Mark 4:26: "When the grain is ripe, at once the reaper puts in the sickle." Ever since the cross Jesus has been harvesting this earth, His kingdom of good deeds.

So you get the picture . . . The saints broken and bloodied sing on Mount Zion, and suddenly there is *fruit*. The reaper shows up, and fruit happens.

The Israelites put the choir in front of the army and sing. Broken, humbled slaves walk through the dessert, sing, and the walls of Jericho come falling down. And they possess the Promised Land.

Paul and Silas, broken and bloodied, sing in the Philippian jail. The earth shakes, walls come tumbling down, and they evangelize Europe. *That's fruit*.

Jesus, broken and bloodied, sings from a cross the first line of Psalm 22. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He died before he could finish the song, yet in dying He gives birth to a new creation, like a seed

dropped into broken, fertile soil.

Isaiah 54: “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear . . . ! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married.” *Sing . . . sing* and bear fruit!

In Romania, I met bloodied, broken, singing Christians who toppled the government. More importantly, they led a nation to the foot of the cross.

Last week legislators, broken and bloodied, met on the steps of the Capitol and sang a *prayer*: “God Bless America.” And where was the ACLU?

In scripture, folks *sing* in hard times, and stuff grows.

Last week I felt bad after preaching, because I felt I didn’t express enough sympathy. (I don’t think you could ever express *enough* sympathy.) I felt bad until I went home and read Luke 12 and 13. Jesus teaches in 12:57, “Be careful about demanding justice for yourselves. If you do, you’ll end up in jail and will have to pay every last penny.”

Then some guy says, “Jesus, did you hear what Pilate did?—a great injustice, a terrorist act. He *slaughtered* some Galileans while they were worshipping in the temple. What about *that*?” Jesus looked at him and said, “Do you think that *they* were worse sinners than the rest?”

I’m sure the guys were thinking, “No . . . wait a minute . . . that’s *not* where we were going with this. We were hoping for a little righteous indignation, you know.” Jesus looks at them and says, “Unless you repent you will likewise perish.” That’s *harsh*. But it gets worse.

He tells them a story about a fig tree that will not bear fruit. The fig tree is Israel. The master says, “Cut it down.” The gardener says, “No, wait . . . I’ll go around the base of the tree, break up the soil, and throw some ‘koprión’ on it. (In the King James Version, “I’ll dung it. I’ll throw some crap on it.”) Maybe it will bear fruit then.”

Listen closely: God loves Israel. And we *are* Israel

more than we can possibly begin to even comprehend. Yet it is amazing how broken ground and manure make stuff grow.

Last Friday the construction guys over at the new church came over and got Aram and asked him to lead them in prayer. They ended up having a *church service* in the *sanctuary* of our *new building*. (And it kind of ticks me off, because Aram preached the first sermon in the new sanctuary! But we'll let it slide because it's pretty good fruit . . .)

Philip Yancey faxed me last week. Wal-Mart, Amazon.com, Walden Books, and Barnes & Noble all want special edition copies of his book *Where Is God When It Hurts?* All the proceeds go to help the folks in New York. *That's fruit.*

They're singing prayers on the steps of the U.S. Capitol; the President is calling the entire nation to pray, and people are actually doing it. I saw Dan Rather break down weeping on the *David Letterman Show* over the sacrificial love of those New York firemen. You see, he's weeping over fruit that looks like Jesus.

And last Sunday I bet there were more worshippers in church in this country than there have ever been. We had about a twenty-five to thirty percent increase. Nationwide that must have added up to millions upon millions singing praises to Jesus, who did not sing them the week before.

Keep this in mind: Not just 6,000 in New York, but *all* of us will die one day. It's not a question of *if* you die, but what song will you be singing when you do?

In scripture, good deeds are fruit. We don't make fruit; all we do is prepare the soil and make sure it's fertile, broken, and humble in order to receive the implanted seed. Revelation 14:13: "Happy [blessed] are the dead who die in the Lord . . . rested from their labor." "Rested" is *arist subjunctive*, as if it could be something that has already

happened here on earth. We are to “strive to enter that rest” (Hebrews 4), and good deeds then follow.

In Mark 4:26, “the farmer sleeps and the harvest grows. . . . he knows not how.” Yes, he works breaking the soil and getting it ready, but it grows while he’s sleeping. “Rested from his labor” . . . that is, fruit doesn’t happen by your own effort. It’s something *God* does, like wheat, like grapes, like children.

There is imitation fruit, and sometimes it’s very hard to tell the difference, but the real deal is made by God. Imitation fruit is made by humans.

Last year when I read the Koran, I was struck by how human it is. It’s this guy Muhammad just talking . . . talk, talk, talk . . . about *everything*. No stories, no songs, no poems. Just advice, law. But the Bible spans thousands of years with many different authors through whom God spoke . . . poems, stories, songs. It’s one tremendous story from front to back. And when there is law, it’s law to help you understand a person, like a personals ad in the newspaper.

The Koran is just Muhammad talking in the desert along about 600 A.D., 600 years after Christ died, in another country. He says Jesus didn’t actually die and didn’t actually rise from the dead. That’s pretty different from what I believe.

In the Koran, good deeds are small. (Sura 47: “Allah wants some but not all of your money.”) In the Koran, evil is small, so small that some people are good enough. In the Koran, because good is small and evil is small, *grace* is small. Allah’s merciful, but only on those who deserve it. (Sura 4:108—”Allah is forgiving, merciful . . . but loves not those that deceive themselves.”)

In the Bible, *everybody* deceives themselves! In the Bible, *everybody* is dead in their trespasses and sins! In the Bible, *no* one is good but God alone! So in the Bible, *grace* is

everything! For we are all saved one hundred percent “by grace through faith, and this not of ourselves, lest any should boast.”

Muhammad taught, don’t kill the innocent. Bin Laden teaches, none of those Americans are innocent. Jesus teaches, you didn’t quite go far enough. *Nobody’s* innocent! And they *all* deserve to die! Yet He died for all.

So we are tolerant, not because people are the *same*, but because God has been so furiously, relentlessly tolerant of us.

The Koran struck me as so human. It’s exactly what *I* would have written, if *I* was an Arab wanting to unify some tribes and make a kingdom. It’s about human energy and human kingdoms, so it participates in human violence yet motivates everyone with other-worldly rewards, that is, big-eyed virgins feeding you fruit on couches in the Garden of Eden. I can see the attraction there, but it’s pretty *human* . . . 666, a thoroughly human number.

It teaches, *I* can do it. *I* can pay. *I* can buy some of those heavenly virgins . . . pay for love. Do you know what that is? That’s *whoredom*. If I act like I’ve earned my bride, I make her a whore. Do you think if you’re good enough, you’ll get into Heaven? In Christianity, Heaven isn’t just a place; it’s a person. And thinking you can pay for that person is the depths of depravity.

Islam is entirely different from Christianity. But Islam is almost exactly the same as most of that run of the mill American Civic Religion:

“Just do good deeds, and God will let you in.”

“It’s not Jesus, the person of God.”

“Just be good, and you can get God’s stuff.”

Those good deeds are imitation fruit, man-made fruit, worse than no fruit, a product of Hell.

In Matthew, Jesus says His kingdom is like good seed sown in a field, but the enemy has also sown tares—weeds that look like wheat. He says, “Don’t try to remove the tares because you’ll wreck the wheat. At the harvest, they’ll be separated.” The harvester knows; Jesus knows . . . but it’s very hard for us to tell.

Last week after the service, a friend came up to me and put his arms on my shoulders and said, “I agree with everything you said, but I have so many questions. I’m a soldier. I was in Desert Storm.” I don’t know if I was anticipating the questions correctly, but I stopped him and said, “I don’t think I have the answers.”

A book like the Koran *does*. It will tell you exactly what to do. A book like the Bible—like the New Testament—doesn’t really.

So Christians have argued for 2,000 years about whether or not it’s a sin or a duty for a Christian to serve in an army and fight in a war. Many have said yes, it’s a sin, and they have very deep theological and convincing reasons. Many have said no; in fact, it’s a duty to fight if it’s a just war under a legitimate government, because God grants the sword to protect its citizens (Romans 13).

I wish we had time to discuss all the views, but in the end, maybe God doesn’t want us to get the answer from a book. Maybe the answer has far more to do with the disposition of our hearts. So you can’t judge the fruit from the outside. Only God can judge from the inside.

So I would suppose that there are pacifists just filled with hatred, pride, and an evil cowardice. And I suppose there are soldiers burning with love for God and love even for their enemies (as Jesus commanded) as well as for those they protect . . . and *visa versa*.

Maybe good deeds are good because of the song you sing in your heart when you do them. The outside may sometimes be the same, but the Father knows. He knows love songs.

My closet at home is full of videos of musicals, which is strange because I *hate* musicals. But *these* musicals I love, because my kids are in them. They are church musicals and school musicals, and you wouldn't understand them very well because the videos only show the parts where my kids sing, and only my kids in those parts.

Those songs abide on video in the hall closet. And it's not the words that my kids sing out loud (they're the same words as all the others sing, and besides, they're usually off-key); it's that I know my five-year-old is singing them out of a heart that is thoroughly in love with me. They're singing *to me*.

For a daddy, that's the measure of a good deed—a good song.

Did you know that the words to the song of the Lamb—the new song that no one else can learn—appear to be printed in the next chapter? Perhaps it's not the words themselves but the heart with which we sing them as children of God.

My favorite song is: "I love you a bushel and a peck, a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck, a hug around the neck and a bushel and a peck . . ."

Only one person in the world can sing it truly. She used to sing it to me in high school. She loved me more than she loved any other guy in the whole world. For a bridegroom, that's the measure of a good deed—a good song. Now she's my wife, and that song has born great fruit: Jonathan, Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Coleman.

God is a daddy, and Jesus is *the Bridegroom*. And they both are one farmer growing fruit . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-

control . . . or as Paul puts it, “faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.” That fruit cannot be grown simply by human effort. You can only prepare the soil, broken and fertile. You can only surrender to the Father, surrender to the Bridegroom.

You can practice notes, you can practice the score, but if you really want to play the song, at some point you have to surrender to the song and *lose* yourself in the music.

It’s interesting that “Islam” means “surrender.” But most Muslims attempt to surrender to the law—the score . . . to play the notes without hearing the song. A song can sweep you away. You can lose your *self* in a song.

Christians have tried to surrender to the law of God, to playing all the notes. But the score, the law of God, is so demanding that it breaks them—humbles them, and they have to surrender to the love of God, the grace of God, the song of God, *Jesus*. We surrender to Jesus, the person of God, and He romances us. He sings over us until His life begins to grow in us and we *sing back* to Him. His life in us bears fruit.

If you say, “Well, I don’t feel like singing,” maybe God in His mercy will come and break up the hard soil of your heart . . . maybe even throw some crap on it. You see, people change their song in times like these. Times like these break people and open them to the seed. And Jesus said, “Bear the fruit that befits repentance.”

If you *still* don’t feel like singing, read on . . . The wheat is harvested—the bread . . .

REVELATION 14:17-20: *And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. [I think these are the same two at work, by the way.] Then another angel came out from the altar [which is in the temple], the angel*

who has power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

One thousand six hundred stadia is the length of Israel. And it covers Israel . . . the depths of the horse's bridle . . . enough blood to cover all Israel and indeed to cover the entire earth.

Most commentators say this is simply a picture of judgment on the unbelieving followers of the Beast who have been told they'll "drink the wine of the fury of the wrath of God." In Isaiah and Joel, trodding the grapes is judgment on the enemies of God. Right here it says they are the "grapes of wrath."

So commentators say the grain harvest (bread) is good works that God does. The *grape* harvest (wine) is Satan's evil works. Maybe so, but this passage has *haunted* me this week.

A harvest of evil doesn't make sense. The farmer burns the stalks, the chaff, and the tares, but not the grain. It's the harvest. The vinedresser prunes and burns the branches that won't bear fruit, but not the *grapes*.

In John 15, Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me that you might bear much fruit." That would be grapes.

The first angel comes from the altar in the temple, which is us . . . the altar where the sacrifices are made in our hearts.

The second angel throws these grapes into the winepress of the wrath of God. Winepresses and grapes make *wine*. Yet this wine flows out and turns into *blood*. Blood that's wine, wine that's blood . . . that sounds familiar.

The winepress is trodden “outside the city” where the sin offerings are made. Hebrews 13:13-16 points out that Jesus suffered *outside* the gate, *outside* the camp, *outside* the city of Jerusalem. That's where the Lamb on the throne of God was slain. And there is a river of blood that flows from that place, enough to cover all Israel and indeed the entire world.

I John 2:2: “He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.” He *satisfies* God's wrath. And I know we're skirting across incredible theological mysteries that are far beyond us, but I believe the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God is a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem on which God in Christ bore the sins of the world, suffering his own wrath on our behalf. Now every person ever born must somehow go to that cross, visit the winepress, and see that their sins crucified the King of Glory.

If they hate God and are of the Beast and the Dragon, they will drink the “wine of the fury of the wrath of God”—*blood*. If they *love* God they drink the “wine of the kingdom”—the forgiveness of sins.

I know from experience—I've seen this—that communion wine burns the Dragon Satan like fire. But to you, children of God, it is the sweet gift of grace, the wine of the kingdom.

Jesus said, “Abide in me that you might bear fruit.” Perhaps that fruit is surrendered lives and sacrificed lives. Yet we were enemies of God, so our lives are infected with sin. But *confessed sin* is the fruit of abiding in Christ. Unless you abide in Christ, you don't even *see* your sins, let alone confess them or surrender your life.

But in repentance and confession, broken and humbled, He takes our sin to His cross, He dies in our place, our confessed sins are crushed in the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God . . . crucified with Christ.

His blood is our wine. It flows from His cross. We drink it—His life blood. Seed enters the broken, humbled soil of our hearts, life begins to grow, and we begin to sing. We join the great symphony.

My children sing love songs to me because I have loved them. My bride sings love songs to me because I have loved her. Why *do* you sing to Jesus? If you don't feel like singing, go to the cross and see the love of God in Christ Jesus for you and for a world. So much sin, so much wrath does Jesus bear, that there is a *river* of blood that flows from that place and fills Israel to the depth of a horse's bridle. Do you get the picture? All those great war horses stop in a river of Lamb's blood.

So if you don't feel like singing, spend some time at that cross, and you'll be broken, you'll be humbled, and you'll begin to sing. And don't be surprised if you see some fruit. "I don't know how, and it's weird, but I'm starting to love my mother-in-law! And those cousins from Des Moines!"

How did that happen? Good deeds are *His* life in you.

Bride of Christ, the harvest of the earth is bread and wine, body and blood of Jesus our Lord. He *is* good deeds born of you.

In Islam, guys earn virgins in Heaven. In Christianity, Jesus wins you, His Bride, with sacrificial love. "You have been saved by grace through faith for good deeds which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in them." Your good deeds did not save you. What arrogance! *God* saved you for His good deeds.

I think the sin of those terrorists who flew those planes wasn't so much *cowardice* as *arrogance*. And that's familiar.

Islam is all about *us*: dependent on us and our effort. So Muhammad takes us *very seriously*. He's *very serious* and *very grave* and *very dead* . . . and he never sings.

Christianity is about *God*: dependent upon God and His furious grace over us. So Christians must take God *extremely seriously*, so seriously that they sing all the time. Commanded to rejoice.

One other thing: The reaper has gotten a lot of bad press. But the reaper is anything but grim. Right now I suspect He's dancing on streets of gold, with a whole bunch of New Yorkers, to the sound of all creation praising Him, and to us singing the song of the Lamb.

The reaper is your Bridegroom. If you really believe that, you can sing always, like you are supposed to, like Coleman — so much life, you can't help it!

Further Reading

Muslims believe that God has previously revealed Himself to the earlier prophets of Jews and Christians, such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims therefore accept the teachings of both the Jewish Torah and the Christian Gospels.

-PBS Website

God is forgiving, merciful. And plead not with Us for those who are self-deceivers; for God loveth not him who is deceitful, criminal. . . . God truly will not forgive the joining of other gods with Himself. Other sins He will forgive to whom He will: but he who joineth gods with God, hath erred with far-gone error. . . . And for their saying, "Verily we have slain the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, an apostle of God." Yet they slew him not and they crucified him not, but they had only his likeness. And they who differed about him were in doubt concerning him: No sure knowledge had they about him, but followed only an opinion, and they did not really slay him, but God took him up to Himself. And God is mighty, wise! . . . O ye people of the Book! overstep not bounds in your religion; and of God, speak only truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only an apostle of God, and His word which He conveyed into Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Himself. Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say not, "Three:" (there is a Trinity)—Forbear—it will be better for you. God is only one God! Far be it from His glory that He should have a son!

-Sura IV, *The Koran*, Muhammad

~600 A.D. somewhere in Saudi Arabia

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also

received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

-I Corinthians 15:3-8, 17

(55 A.D., 22 years after Christ's death, Ephesus)

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. . . . Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

-I John 2:22-23, 4:1-3

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle

in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe."

-Revelation 14:13-15

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

-Mark 4:26-29

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. . . ."

-John 4:35

Another parable he put before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

-Matthew 13:24-30

“And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper.” There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Silo'am fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

-Luke 12:57-13:9

“Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

-Matthew 3:8-10

So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia. . . . He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

-Revelation 14:19-20, 19:13-15

(Note: Also read Hebrews 10:13-16 – what happens outside the camp.)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

-John 15:1-5

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son . . .”

-John 5:22

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in.

-John 8:15-16

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . . Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

-John 12:24, 31-32

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-- not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

-Ephesians 2:4-10

If you are fortunate enough to be Awakened thus, you will know why the finest language is the one that is not spoken, the finest action is the one that is not done and the finest change is the one that is not willed.

-Anthony DeMello

A saint is not someone who is good but who experiences the goodness of God.

-Thomas Merton, *Christianity and Bearing Arms*

So clear was the opposition of the early Christians to bearing arms that Celsus, in his famous attack on them, declared that if all were to do as did the Christians the Empire would fall victim to the wildest and most lawless barbarians. In replying, Origen did not deny that Christians were pacifists. Indeed, he said that Christians do not fight under the Emperor “although he require it.” Instead he argued that if all were to become Christians, the barbarians would also be Christian, and that even now, when Christians were in the minority, their love, labour, and prayers were doing more than Roman arms to preserve the realm.

For the early Christians, pacifism was largely theoretical, for they were chiefly from groups other than those from which the legions were recruited and they did not have the responsibility for formulating state policy.

In spite of the general trend among Christians towards pacifism, in the third century the numbers of Christians serving in the legions seem to have increased. This was especially the case on the frontiers, menaced as they were by invasion, and in the West.

Moreover, after the Emperors had espoused Christianity and they and Christian officials were charged with the responsibility for the body politic and for making decisions for the government, the attitude of the majority of Christians towards war changed. Christians now began to believe that some wars are just. That was the position taken by Ambrose. Augustine elaborated the theoretical basis for a just war. He held that wickedness must be restrained, by force if necessary, and that the sword of the magistrate is divinely commissioned. Not all wars are just. To be just, so

Augustine said, a war must be waged under the authority of the prince, it must have as its object the punishment of injustice and the restoration of peace, and it must be fought without vindictiveness and without unnecessary violence. It must also be carried on with inward love. Yet without the authority of the prince, Augustine taught, the civilian must not use force to defend even his own life. The clergy and the monks were to be entirely exempt from military service. It was the principle of a righteous or just war which was held by a large proportion of Christians in subsequent centuries.

-Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christianity*

The Gospel of Wrath

It's Perfect

(Revelation 15)

Several years ago in Prague, Vera Czermak, having learned that her husband betrayed her, jumped from her third-story window. The newspaper, *Vicerni Praha*, reported that Mrs. Czermak was recovering in the hospital after landing on her husband, who was killed. Isn't that cool? That's the way it should be, right? — *Justice*.

According to the Associated Press, in August 1991, a thief decided to siphon gas from Dennis Quiggley's motor home in Seattle, Washington. Dennis, inside the motor home, heard a commotion outside and went to investigate. He found the thief curled up in a ball on the lawn, vomiting violently. Intending to suck the contents of the gas tank through a hose, the thief had accidentally put the hose in the wrong hole and sucked up the contents of the sewage tank instead.

The thief, a boy of fourteen, was not prosecuted because Dennis and the police agreed that he had suffered enough. Justice had been meted out! That's the way it's supposed to be! That's the way justice should work!

On September 11, we watched the World Trade Center engulfed in the darkest cloud, burning with jet fuel. You saw on TV little, black specks falling not from the third floor but, like, the 100th floor. Something deep, deep within cried, "This is *not* the way it's supposed to be. This is not right. It needs to be finished." And you felt a passion to finish it.

Indignation, wrath, anger, longing for justice.

Justice cannot be explained by Charles Darwin. You long for it because you're being made in the image of God.

On the back page of *Time Magazine* right after the attack, Lance Marrow wrote this:

For once, let's have no "grief counselors" standing by with banal consolations, as if the purpose, in the midst of all this, were merely to make everyone feel better as quickly as possible. We shouldn't feel better. . . . A day cannot live in infamy without the nourishment of rage. Let's have rage. What's needed is a united, unifying, Pearl Harbor sort of purple American fury—a ruthless indignation that doesn't leak away in a week or two, wandering into a Prozac-induced forgetfulness [a walking death]. . . . Let America explore the rich reciprocal possibilities of the *fatwa*.

Do you know what "the fatwa" is? It's an Islamic term. It's a declaration to kill in order to fulfill justice. Osama bin Laden issued one for you. I know that's Islam, but *God* has issued fatwas . . . or have you not read the Old Testament?

"For once let's have no grief counselors standing by with banal consolations." Americans have developed "banal consolations" into an art form. All of them are just ways to deny that we live in a "God-damned," evil world. "We shouldn't feel better," writes Lance Marrow. *So desperate* are we to feel better.

On TV this week, they were showing a peace rally . . . already. I watched it a bit . . . to me it looked like a denial of evil— "Go hide in Canada." That kind of pacifism turns my stomach . . . wealthy Americans who run from violence and live in a world of denial.

We American Christians are really good at that. My children each have one of those Precious Moments Bibles. It's a *good* Bible, but the cover says "Precious Moments" and has a picture of these cute, little, precious, cartoon kids.

When I look at it I wonder, What "precious moments" are they talking about? When God damned the world in Genesis 3? Is *that* it? Maybe circumcision? What about when the only sinless, perfect man who ever lived was beaten and stripped and nailed to a cross and consumed by the wrath of God? Or maybe when he said, "Listen—if you want to be *my* disciple, you have to pick up one of these crosses and come follow me"?

There are Christians who actually believe God is opposed to violence in all forms. Yet Jesus said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth and would that it were already kindled." There are people who call themselves Christians and actually say, "I don't believe in a God of wrath." Then you don't believe in the cross . . . the atonement.

If you don't believe in the God of wrath, I don't think you believe in the God who is love. For love demands wrath. It's *so easy* to be a pacifist if you love no one. Satan rages in a fury, but he does not know or understand God's wrath. For God's wrath is a function of His relentless love.

C. S. Lewis wrote: "Anger [wrath] is the fluid love bleeds when you cut it."

I don't know if I had even begun to understand wrath until I had kids. It's not because they were so *bad*, but because I loved them so much. I shared this with some of you a few years ago, but I remember a time in Danville when Elizabeth was about two. I was sitting on a railroad tie in the park watching my priceless, precious, little daughter Elizabeth going up and down the slide, so proud of herself.

Then this other two-year-old came along with her mother. This two-year-old was going up and down the slide, and this mother thought *her* daughter was just priceless and

precious. She was saying, “Oh, you’re so wonderful!” She was encouraging, “You’re doing great!” But she never even *noticed* Elizabeth.

Finally, Elizabeth walked to the top of the slide, sat down, and started yelling at the lady, “See me? See me? I do it! I do it! See me?” And the lady *did not even* turn her head. I had this fantasy that flashed through my mind . . . I still remember it . . . of me picking up a board and smacking the woman right up side the head. It shocked me! *Wrath*. But, you see, that’s part of a father’s heart.

Do you think the Father in Heaven loved those 6,000 people in the World Trade Center . . . thousands and thousands of worlds destroyed . . . children . . . families? This is one of the problems with wrath: How could there ever be enough of it to set things straight? Enough boards . . . enough blood . . .

If we kill Osama bin Laden today, that’s a drop of blood for an ocean of blood.

We Americans are just beginning to understand how much of the world feels and how the Church felt in the time of the Revelation. In Revelation 6:10, the slaughtered cry out from under the altar in the temple, “How long, O Lord, before you will avenge our blood . . . ?”

Let’s face it: We couldn’t make Osama bin Laden pay, because he doesn’t have enough blood.

But that leads to another problem with wrath. Short of blood, we make *other* people pay. The terrorists exercised indiscriminate wrath. So *we* are tempted to exercise indiscriminate wrath in *return!* Just go blow the *Hell* out of all Afghanistan! We underpay or we overpay wrath.

But how are we to know how much to dish out? Even with people like Osama bin Laden? I read somewhere that he is one of fifty kids. I’m sure he had a *great* relationship with old dad . . . He grew up nurtured in war, and who knows all the demons that plague his soul? Who

was it that nurtured him in that war? And where *does* he get his money? — CIA . . . gas. Well, who knows what he's really responsible for?

You see, dispensing wrath is insanely difficult. It's also an incredible burden. You know people who are enslaved to a burden of wrath — angry people, bitter people — enslaved by their own lack of forgiveness.

I know many of you are thinking, "That's why we must entrust wrath to God — 'Vengeance is mine,' says the Lord." But let's be honest. We have trouble entrusting our *finances* to God, let alone our *wrath*, which comes from deep within.

For one, we worry that God will *underpay*, that He's like one of those pacifists who will pretend nothing really happened — denial. "What if bin Laden dies an easy death?"

In II Peter 2:9, Peter writes, "God knows how to preserve the unrighteous for the day of punishment." And God says, "Vengeance is mine." So Paul adds, "Trust him with vengeance." In other words, *you* forgive, and let Him avenge.

Secondly, we worry not only that God might *underpay*, but that He might *overpay*. As a young believer, I think my deepest struggle with my faith was the doctrine that God would send the reprobate to Hell to be tortured with wrath for *ever* and *ever* and *ever* without end! That's a lot of *wrath!* — for a fifteen-year-old who dies in a car accident.

I know we sin against an infinite God, but does that mean infinite wrath *forever*? Such that God Himself is enslaved to His own bitter wrath *forever*? Is that you, Jesus?

Thirdly, we have a hard time trusting God's wrath, because when God's wrath falls on earth, it seems so indiscriminate. Hurricanes, floods, the World Trade Center . . .

Jerry Falwell suggested the Trade Center tragedy happened because of homosexuals in America. I don't

know . . . maybe that's partly true . . . but were they all *gay* in the World Trade Center?

In 1998 on the *700 Club*, Pat Robertson predicted that God would visit hurricanes and tornadoes upon Orlando, Florida for sponsoring that year's "Gay Day Festival." Shortly after that, the first hurricane of the season hit the east coast. But it didn't hit Orlando, Florida. It hit Virginia Beach, home of the 700 Club.

It's hard to entrust wrath to God, for we worry He'll dispense too little or too much or do it in the wrong place . . . indiscriminately. Even worse, deep inside we fear this the very most: He may dispense wrath to absolute perfection.

As I sat on the timber in the park, fantasizing about hitting this woman in the head with a board because she ignored my priceless little princess, I had this thought . . . I believe it came from my Father in Heaven . . . "Peter, now you know just a little how I feel for all my children." I thought, Oh, God! How many children have *I* ignored? In the Sudan . . . in Ethiopia . . . in Mexico, not sitting on slides but in garbage heaps saying, "Look at me! I'm hungry."

What if He feels over them the way I feel over my daughter? For that matter, what if He thinks the lady in the park is one of His children, and He reads my thoughts? I suppose He feels that way over Afghan children, over terrorist children, maybe even over *terrorists*. (When Elizabeth was two, sometimes she *acted* like a terrorist . . . and I still loved her.)

What if He felt about everyone on the planet the way I felt about Elizabeth sitting on that slide that day? — *so much wrath . . . so much blood . . . all* of us guilty as Hell.

What does a Daddy do when His own children murder each other? Rape each other? Destroy each other? And I'm one of them. What does a Father do with His wrath? — I guess just kill them all . . . flood them all . . . drown them all. In fact, He tried that once. The problem

was, Noah got away.

That's the huge mystery in the Bible: Why are we still here? It's not a mystery in the Koran, because some people are *good*. People say, "Don't bash the Koran. There's violence in the Old Testament too." Well, there *sure is*. The mystery is why there is not *more*. At the very beginning, it's as if God Himself issues a fatwa against *all humanity*. He says, "If you eat the fruit of the tree, you will die." We ate, so we're either dead or dying (walking dead). Paul writes, "The wrath of God *is* [not *will be*] being revealed."

What a nightmare. We long for justice, yet the justice we long for is our own death. The wrath of God — what a nightmare. For years I was terrified of Revelation 15-16. That is where the wrath of God is poured out. So I didn't read it . . . denial of a nightmare.

You'll remember that in chapter fourteen, John has just watched Jesus trample the grapes of wrath outside the city where He was crucified. Blood flowed from the wine press like a river that filled the whole land to the depth of a horse's bridle. That's a lot of blood.

REVELATION 15: *Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.*

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall

come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed."

After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever; and the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended [in Greek, "teleos"].

Then John watches as the angels pour out the bowls of wrath upon the earth in chapter sixteen: sores, the sea becomes blood, the rivers become blood, the sun scorches men and women, the Beast's kingdom is plunged into darkness.

And *nobody* repents. Demons and armies ready for Armageddon. At the last bowl, mountains and islands flee, and all opposed to God end in the Lake of Fire.

These seven bowls in chapter sixteen are very much like the ten plagues on Egypt, which were "poured out" immediately before Israel passed through the Red Sea and sang the song of Moses. Here in chapter fifteen of Revelation, the saints seem to pass through this sea of fire and glass, and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

The seven bowls are also very much like the seven seals and seven trumpets, except with the seals, things happen in fourths, and with the trumpets, things happen in thirds. Now with the bowls, the plagues are complete. (Not a third of the sea but *all* of the sea turns to blood.)

Seven bowls of wrath are also like the seven days of creation, only in reverse. If you want wrath, you'll get it. And it will be perfect. Yet this is good, wonderful news?

Did you notice the seven angels come out of the temple? Maybe they are the seven angels in the seven churches. Remember, we make up the temple.

I think the seven angelos messengers that seem like the seven spirits before the throne (which are the eyes of the Lamb, the Spirit of God sent out into the entire earth) are the Holy Spirit or closely connected to the Spirit who lives in us—the temple—the Church—the tabernacle. And each one of them is dressed like Jesus dressed in chapter one — He wore a white, linen robe with a golden sash around His chest.

Remember, Jesus said, “On the day of judgment the king will say, ‘Whatever you did to the least of these you did to me.’” Why will He say that? — Because the king was *in* them. He dwells in His temple, His brethren.

So this is judgment: How you treat Christ in His temple. And you are that temple, children of God. He knows every thought. The Angel of Yahweh is in the temple — *us*. So these angels do not pour these bowls indiscriminately. It's perfect and absolute.

I believe wrath probably was being poured out at the World Trade Center. I believe it's being poured out all the time. Paul said it in Romans 1:18: “The wrath of God is being revealed against all ungodliness and wickedness of men, who by their wickedness suppress the truth.”

So I bet wrath was being poured out in New York. But not *just* wrath. I bet some saw seals broken revealing the glory of Christ, some heard trumpets, even the last trumpet calling, “Come home! Come home!” Some heard the thunders speak wonders that cannot be uttered on earth.

And yes, I imagine some drank from the cup of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. Seals, trumpets,

thunders, bowls . . . I believe they're all happening. To the outsider, they look the same and so indiscriminate. But to the receiver, they're not at *all* the same. His judgments are revealed, and they are not indiscriminate but a perfect wonder.

In verse one, John writes that the sign or portent is great and wonderful, for with these seven plagues the wrath of God is ended—"teleo"—perfected. I'm just going to believe scripture on this one. The wrath of God comes to an end. That means if souls are forever tormented in Hell, it's not by the wrath of God. In fact, in the second death (Revelation 20), death and Hell themselves get thrown in the Lake of Fire. "And death shall be no more" (Revelation 21). No living death — annihilation. The wrath of God comes to an end . . . even better, a "teleos"—a perfection.

The seventh bowl is like the seventh and last trumpet. At the last trumpet, "the dead will be raised imperishable," writes Paul. The seventh bowl and the seventh trumpet anticipate the last plague on the Egyptians, which you remember was the death of the first-born son.

As the seventh bowl is being poured out, as God's wrath is complete, as mountains and hills flee away, in verse 17 a voice comes out of the temple from the throne. Who is on the throne? — A slaughtered Lamb, the first-born Son of God, only begotten of the Father. And the voice cries, "It is done." Lightning flashes and the earth shakes.

When Jesus hung on that cross outside Jerusalem, trampling the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God, John records that as He was dying, with His last breath He said, "It is finished [teleo]!" And the lightning flashed and the earth shook.

On that cross, Jesus didn't just save us from Satan and death, He saved us from the wrath of God Almighty by bearing it Himself. There God fulfilled His fatwa against humanity, and the blood flowed a river over all the land to

the depth of a horse's bridle. That is *enough blood*. On that cross, Jesus didn't just die His own death; he bore the entire wrath of God for an entire "God-damned" world. That's a lot of blood.

Every bowl, every sin, every sorrow; every tear wept by every child in New York City going to bed alone; the anxiety of every mother at the Afghan border trying to feed her children; every pain, every sorrow, every sin, He Himself bore. God in flesh bore it. What does a good Father *do* with all His wrath? He bears it Himself. And on that cross, the Father's wrath was teleos—perfected—ended.

The wrath of God *will* come to an end, either at the cross or in the Lake of Fire. The question is, Where does it come to an end for *you*? Surrender wrath to Jesus, and it ends at the cross. Harbor wrath for yourself, and it will end with you in the Lake of Fire. *Fire*.

We say, "Well, that's fine, but why do we have to live in this world of fire and wrath in the *first* place?" The wrath of God will come to an end, but better than that, it will come to a teleos—a perfection—a goal.

This is the incredible news: The wrath of God has a *goal*. Satan's fury has no goal; it's a reaction. God's wrath is not simply a reaction to sin. That's not the deepest story. God's wrath is part of a glorious plan set forth at the foundation of the world: "Let us make man in our own image."

In chapter fifteen, it appears these saints pass through the sea of fire and glass, just like the Israelites passed through the Red Sea. The same sea that baptized, delivered, and created the Israelites consumed the Egyptians.

The saints stand on the edge of the sea and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb—God's salvation. Only *they*, the children of God, can sing it. It is faith in the relentless love of the Father. Maybe the sea of fire not only consumes

what's evil but purifies what's good . . . things like our "faith, more precious than gold, which though perishable is tested [refined] by fire."

Maybe fire consumes evil and purifies the good. Maybe it's how we're made — in His image.

What *is* the fire? This is wild . . . it's a *huge mystery*, and I'm not saying I really understand it. The author of Hebrews says, "Our God is a consuming fire." The word "theion" in Greek can be translated both as "brimstone" and "divinity." In Revelation 14, 19, 20, and 21, we read about the lake of "fire and brimstone," or "fire and divinity," or "fire that is divinity."

John in I John writes, "God is love." I don't think that means He is *part* love and *part* fire. I think that means His *love* is fire. And Jesus did say, "I came to cast fire upon the earth. How I am constrained until it is accomplished. I did not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword."

He taught us His Spirit would convict the world of sin. He taught that His cross was the judgment. That fire did fall at Pentecost—the Spirit of the Living God.

And the Church *did* go to war. And Satan *is* defeated. And the gates of Hell *cannot* prevail against the Church. And saints *do* conquer by "the blood of the Lamb." For He has given us His blood to drink. It is the fluid. Love bled when it was cut on Calvary. Sweet wine to the children of God, fiery wrath to the Prince of Darkness, but the same fluid. The love of God in Christ is a consuming fire, and it is what we are to bleed. It's called *forgiveness*. When we forgive, we bleed fire.

There are people who are called "Christian Pacifists," people like Quakers, Mennonites, Amish . . . maybe even you . . . I *hope* you, at least in your personal life . . . when you "turn the other cheek" like Jesus told you to do, when you hang on crosses, when you bleed with Jesus.

People like that are hardly pacifists; in fact, I really

believe they're the most violent people on earth. It's just they don't battle any earthly kingdom. They battle the kingdom of Hell with the fire of God, the blood of Christ, the grace of God. They pour it unmixed on the head of the Evil One, and it burns him like hot coals, exposing every one of his foul arguments, obstacles to the glory of God.

They are people like John, exiled on the island of Patmos; Peter, crucified upside-down; Paul, beheaded; the martyrs in the seven churches that changed the world . . . people like St. Francis of Assisi, people like Mother Theresa . . . people like *you* every time you bleed Jesus' love for someone else. *You* are being made in His image.

The Lamb is the Lion. He *is* the consuming fire. I've seen it fall on demons in prayer, and it burns them like fire. But that very same Spirit on you is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness . . . *life!*

So if you've surrendered to Him and His grace, if you surrender wrath to Him . . .

- The cup of wrath is not blood to you, but wine.
- The Word is not the sword of death but the scalpel of healing.
- The rock does not crush you, but it hides you—your refuge.
- The cross is not your judgment but your salvation.
- The wrath of God is not your horror but a blazing portent in the heavens of your Father's relentless love.
- The fire does not consume you but refines you in His image. And you will stand forever with Jesus singing to the praise of God's glorious grace in Christ for you.

That's the "teleos," that's the end, that's the perfection of the wrath of God – in a word, the Bride of Christ, spotless and without blemish, refined, precious, like a jewel in the New Jerusalem; like gold refined by fire, standing with Jesus, the Great Bridegroom.

In the rubble of the Trade Center, there are diamonds, and they are unscathed. Why? — Because they've already been through the fire. And in the rubble of the Trade Center there is gold. It's in new shapes, but none of it has been consumed. It has only been refined. And in the rubble of the Trade Center, there is a cross. It was on the cover of the *Rocky Mountain News*. Some people say it was an accident. But there *are* no accidents. It's a portent. He's passed through the fire too, and He takes His Bride with Him.

One morning about three years ago my wife Susan woke me up early and said, "Peter, I just had a vision!" (It really kind of freaked her out, because it was a new thing for her. *I've* never had a vision, but she gets them every now and then.) She said:

I looked in the corner of the room, and I saw dark clouds. Then they parted and the sun came out. Before that, I had a clear dream—it seemed so real! I saw thousands of people descending in a line down a spiral staircase. The people were like zombies, like the walking dead. And all along the line there were demons that were harassing them, poking them, and trying to hurt them.

The people didn't even move—they hardly even flinched—because they were *used* to it. They were *used* to being dead. It was *normal* for them.

Then all at once I saw this woman and her eyes weren't cloudy like everyone else's. They were wide open and awake, and she was *alive!* She kept protesting, "Something's wrong here. I'm not supposed to be here. Something's not right." The demons kept harassing her, trying to horrify her and mock her, but she kept protesting. And the line kept moving.

At the bottom of the staircase, there was one huge demon, a beast with eight arms. It would take these zombies and throw them in the Lake of Fire, and they'd be consumed. Then the beast threw that woman in the Lake of Fire. But she wasn't consumed! In fact, she kept protesting, "Something's not right, I'm not supposed to be here."

It absolutely *infuriated* the beast! He went into a rage and was trying to push her into the fire, but each time she would just float back up protesting. He kept pushing her down and she kept rising up, and as I watched this, she gradually began to float out of the reach of the arms of this beast. It was like the whole lake shifted and she floated into this area of cool, clear water (like glass).

Then on the shores I began to see vegetation lush with life. Then I saw Him. I saw Jesus. And He reached in and pulled the woman out of the water and stood her right next to Him. And *she was gorgeous!* It was like she was refined, spun gold. I don't even know what spun gold *is*, but that's what she was! She was radiant.

Jesus looked at her and said,

“Sweetheart, you were meant for *here*.”

Susan had never read Revelation 15. So she said, “Peter, what *was* that? I understand that the end was Heaven, but where were those walking dead, and who was that woman?”

Where were all those people? — *Here*, in the land of the walking dead. And who is the woman? — *Us*, the Bride of Christ.

Revelation 15 is *not* a nightmare. It is one glorious and wonderful dream.

Further Reading

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?”

-Revelation 6:9-10

Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues . . .

-Revelation 15:1a

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness

-Romans 1:18

It may seem strange to say that Mark, having long lived in a world without charity, had nevertheless very seldom met real anger. Malice in plenty he had encountered, but it all operated by snubs and sneers and stabbing in the back.

-C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*

Anger is the fluid that love bleeds when you cut it.

-C. S. Lewis

“I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but

rather division . . . ”

-Luke 12:49-51

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.

-Acts 2:1-3

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

-John 16:7-11

. . . calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb . . . ?”

-Revelation 6:16

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

-Romans 9:22-24

“Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out . . .”

-John 12:31

When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished [teleos]”; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

-John 19:30

Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended [teleos].

-Revelation 15:1

The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!”

-Revelation 16:17

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”

-Revelation 21:8

But for infidels is the fire of Hell; to die shall never be decreed them, nor shall aught of its torment be made light to them. Thus reward We every infidel!

-*The Koran*, Sura 35:34

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,

says the Lord.”

-Romans 12:19

Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

-Romans 5:9

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God. . . . He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

-John 3:16-21, 36

“Son,” he said, “ye cannot in your present state understand eternity: when Anodos looked through the door of the Timeless, he brought no message back. But ye can get some likeness of it if ye say that both good and evil, when they are full grown, become retrospective. Not only this valley but all this earthly past will have been Heaven to those who are saved. Not only the twilight in that town, but all their life on earth too, will then be seen by the damned to have been Hell. This is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, ‘No future bliss can make up for it,’ not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory. And of some sinful

pleasure they say, 'Let me but have *this* and I'll take the consequences': little dreaming how damnation will spread back and back into their past and contaminate the pleasure of the sin. Both processes begin even before death. The good man's past begins to change so that his forgiven sins and remembered sorrows take on the quality of Heaven: the bad man's past already conforms to his badness and is filled only with dreariness. And that is why, at the end of all things, when the sun rises here and the twilight turns to blackness down there, the Blessed will say, 'We have never lived anywhere except in Heaven,' and the Lost, 'We were always in Hell.' And both will speak truly."

-C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.
This is the second death, the lake of fire . . .

-Revelation 20:14

When Fear Turns Into Faith

And What the Prince Is After

(Revelation 16)

Last week Osama bin Laden issued a statement saying he was pleased with the terrorist attack of September 11, because all of America was filled with fear. I think he was at least partly right. Sometimes you can feel it in the air — a spirit of fear.

It's not just America that's in fear; Afghanistan is a garden of terror, for women especially. Women are virtually slaves in Afghanistan. *Imprisoned*. In an effort to restore the "purity of Islam," the Taliban has outlawed almost everything: music, singing, children's toys, even wedding parties. For women, even *more* has been outlawed: employment, education, exposing any skin, laughing in public.

For entertainment, men gather in the old Olympic stadium and watch women as they are flogged or stoned for crimes like exposing their face or walking with a man who is not a relative. Afghan women have been so filled with fear and depression that foreign aid doctors report many of them have burned throats from attempting to kill themselves by drinking battery acid and household cleaners.

And now, on top of everything else, U.S. bombs are exploding throughout their country as their government tells them we *hate* them.

Muslims are quick to point out that the treatment of women in places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan is not representative of all Islam. But it's clear the Koran sees women as inferior. We read this week that one of the terrorists willed that no woman visit his grave. Men are "a step above women" (Sura 2:228) and "superior to

women” (Sura 4:38). In the Koran, men can marry several women and even acquire them with money.

According to many Muslim scholars and the traditional teaching of the Hadith, women are “a toy for the release of man’s sexual storm.” Muslims argue about these things, and clearly Christians have repressed women as well, but the Bible does tell a different story.

In the entire Koran, the word “kiss” never appears once. But the word is absolutely critical in our Scriptures. In fact, at the end of all things, according to the Bible and the book of the Revelation, there is the ultimate Marriage Supper. Heaven is a wedding party. Heaven is illegal in Afghanistan.

Women certainly know fear in any society. Physically and socially they are more vulnerable than men. That’s because their bodies were made to bear life itself. Hating women is hating life.

Recently I saw a movie about a young woman who fell in love but lost her love at sea. She sank into despair. Years later she was kidnapped by thieves, chased by pirates (more thieves) in the night, and finally one pirate captures her. In terror, she finds out this is the man blamed with killing her lover. He holds his blade and tells her, “Life is pain.” He mocks her love and then describes her lover’s death.

Maybe you feel like that woman . . . vulnerable, plagued by terror, afraid love is a sham and death is what’s real. Your world is crumbling, you feel violated, and you wonder, “What do these terrors mean?”

In the beginning we fell, but why did God let us choose evil? Why did He give us our wish? We *died* that day! What do these plagues mean? — wrath, death, hell?

REVELATION 16: *Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."*

So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores came upon the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of water say, "Just art thou in these thy judgments, thou who art and wast, O Holy One. For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due!" And I heard the altar cry, "Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments!"

The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire; men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphra'tes, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; for they are

demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ("Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!") And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armaged'don.

The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and great hailstones, heavy as a hundred-weight, dropped on men from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

There are approximately 2.6 billion views as to what those bowls represent. It's very difficult to know what to take at face value and what is *more*. For instance, the frogs are not just frogs, they are *demons* enticing kings. There is no Armageddon that we know of. The word means "Mountains of Megiddo." There is a Megiddo, but there are no mountains there. Are the sores just *sores*, or are they *more*?

Historists like John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitfield saw the sores as atheism infecting people of the French Revolution. They taught that chapter sixteen was all about the French revolutions and the downfall of the papacy in 1798. And it makes remarkable sense. In fact, they

had some astounding, successful predictions in the eighteenth century.

Preterists say chapter sixteen refers to ancient Rome or Jerusalem. What *they* say fits remarkably well *also*. For instance, at the seventh bowl, one-hundred-pound hailstones fall from the sky onto the city. The Jewish historian Josephus records in his history of the Jews (written independently of the Revelation) that during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the Romans launched one-hundred-pound white stones from catapults, and the Jews cried, “The Son cometh!” Scholars have been confused by that. The best they can make out is that the Jews were mocking Christ and His words on Jerusalem.

According to Josephus, the Sea of Galilee turned to blood, full of the corpses of dead Jews. There were rivers of blood in the city, and like Christ said, Jerusalem fell.

Some Preterists point to the fifth bowl poured on the throne of the Beast. That’s at *least* Rome, but that kingdom fell long ago. Perhaps the throne of the Beast is plunged into darkness more than once.

Futurists love to speculate about a renewed Roman Empire, nuclear war, the red tide, sun scorch through ozone depletion, earthquake-related deaths, and the Asian hordes coming over the Euphrates from places like Afghanistan.

Now we can add new speculations involving America, Osama bin Laden, and world trade.

What’s remarkable to me is how so much of it really fits. Maybe they’re all *partly* right. Maybe all these tribulations are “labor pains,” as Jesus called them. Labor pains come in cycles, over and over, until it’s time for delivery—life. Maybe history is repeating itself all in the service of giving birth to something.

Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, “History consists of parables whereby God communicates in terms that the imagination rather than the mind, faith rather than

knowledge, can grasp.”

That is, God is using the props of history to get us to have faith in something, to give birth to something.

“You know, there are many pleasures in being old and gaga,” writes Muggeridge. “One of the greatest . . . is to realize that history is largely nonsensical. . . . The only reason for studying what goes on is to get at this parable that it conveys. Otherwise it is just like an interminable soap opera whose situations endlessly recur although the characters change.”

I’ve heard my eighty-two-year-old father talk this way. In fact, he was the one who first read me this quote. When I talked to him after the World Trade Center tragedy, his attitude was, Hitler . . . Marx . . . Osama bin Laden . . . seen it all before. How are my grandkids? — tell me about love.

Maybe he is getting the parable. Maybe it’s like G. K. Chesterton argued, “The most reasonable things are fairytales, not facts.”

Well, the bowls, trumpets, and seals look pretty much the same, except seals reveal glories, trumpets proclaim news, and bowls dispense wrath. If you don’t want to experience the bowls of wrath, *repent!* Turn your life over to Christ. Turn your fear into faith.

People who receive the bowls in verses nine, eleven, and twenty-one don’t repent. So *repent* . . . and you might get sores and get sunburned, but it’s not wrath. It’s a broken seal, trumpet, or thunder. Repent and Christ *takes* your wrath. “It is done,” He says. (That was last week’s sermon.)

Now the bowls are also like the plagues on Egypt: sores, blood, hail, fire, darkness, frogs, the slaughter of the first-born.

In the midst of those plagues, God instituted the

Passover. The Jews were to place lamb's blood on their doors so the wrath of God (the last plague, death of the first-born) wouldn't fall on them. They were then to eat the flesh of the lamb *in haste*. They were to be packed and ready to go, for in the morning the Lord was coming to deliver them. That was when they were born as a nation and born as the Bride of Ezekiel 16.

So what does it mean? What did the plagues mean for Israel? It meant the Lord was coming to rescue them. So what does all this tribulation mean for *us believers*? He is coming to take us home. When? — Soon . . . any time . . .

So always be packed. Always be ready; it could be any time.

If that *Left Behind* series is correct, then these people in Revelation 16 would know *exactly* when He was coming: seven years from when all those Christians were raptured.

But right here between the sixth and seventh bowls, He said, "I'm coming like a thief." *Always* be ready. It could be *now*! It could be bio-terrorism this week! If He doesn't come for you at the close of the age, believer, He does come for you the day you die. He said so in John 14. Time is weird, and maybe the day a believer dies and the close of the age are always the same . . . eternity invades *your* time at that point.

But He is coming; always be ready.

And the more intense the tribulation gets, the closer your Lord comes. The more intense the plagues became, the closer the Israelites were to enduring freedom.

Maybe your castle is being stormed; maybe your world is under siege because you are being rescued, and your liberator is drawing near; maybe you're actually imprisoned here, intoxicated into acquiescence by an evil prince who has

lulled you to sleep so you won't hear your Savior's call.

Maybe we were in *much more* danger before September 11 than now, comfortably asleep in the Evil One's castle, but now the Lord is waking us to life, and the tribulation means Jesus is coming!

In the midst of tribulation, Jesus calls, "I'm coming soon!" Does that fill you with *fear* or *hope*? Is He your *enemy* or your *Savior*? Do you fear His wrath? Do you think He's coming to rape you? Steal your life? Crush your heart? Is *that* who you think He is?

I don't think we even begin to understand the sorrow we inflict upon our Lord Jesus when we're afraid. The opposite of fear is faith, and anything that does not "proceed from faith is sin." Over and over in the gospels the disciples insult Christ with their lack of faith. He admonishes them, "Fear not!"

The opposite of fear is faith. Your lack of faith makes you fear.

- The same fear that makes you turn to porn and not trust your desires to Christ
- The same fear that makes you eat and eat and eat instead of stopping
- The same fear that causes you to lie instead of depending on truth
- The same fear that keeps you from entrusting every moment of your life to Christ in joyful and thorough obedience
- The same fear that makes you close your heart to Him

I bet it's the same fear that you felt on September 11. September 11 just awoke you to the fear that was already

there.

Many think they are courageous, but it's just that their faith hasn't been tested and their fears have never been exposed. But fear, hidden or revealed, is what robs you of life now. Fear can be an evil spirit Satan sends to keep you in bondage. So when you are afraid, *rebuke* fear and call on Jesus.

Paul writes, "We have not received a spirit of timidity [fear] but power, love, and self-control." Fear is a false suitor. We think it offers us security, that it will guard our hearts. But for the Bride of Christ, fear is a *lie*. Jesus is our security.

It's true: Fear of God is the "beginning of wisdom," but not the end, for "perfect love casts out fear." John 14:13: "Let not your hearts be troubled," says Jesus, "I will come for you." John 14:18: "I will not leave you desolate. I will come to you." He was talking about His Spirit.

Whenever we hope in Christ's coming (in the end at death), He comes *now* in Spirit and drives out fear.

You've probably already noticed this: You've had moments when the feeling of fear increased. In the last few weeks, you've felt more fear. But you turned to Christ and the feeling of life increased.

Worrying about "bio-terrorism" last week, I went for a walk with Coleman and Becky. I was half-consciously praying, and I thought, "We could all be dead soon." Then I thought, "Well, Jesus, that's great! You love Coleman and Becky more than I do." I looked up, and the sun was shining, the mountains were glorious, and the field in which we were walking by Hampden was bathed in light.

Becky and Coleman were running through the tall grass laughing, and . . . I *lived*. I was blessed; I was happy. I thought, "*glorious!*" And it was. For He was there, transforming fear into faith.

When fear says, "You could die,"
Jesus says, "You will live."
When fear says, "You could get crucified,"
Jesus says, "And I will raise you up."
When fear says, "You could lose everything,"
Jesus says, "I am giving you everything."
When fear says, "Satan is coming to get you,"
Jesus says, "I am coming to set you free."
When fear says, "All Hell has broken loose,"
Jesus says, "Hell is under siege, and Heaven
has come to take you home."

Lookout Mountain Community Church, stop listening to fear! Fear is an insult to Christ, and it robs you of life *now*! When you're afraid, you don't dance well, you don't sing well, and you don't live well. And you certainly don't *kiss* well.

I remember the first time I kissed Susan. She was seventeen years old. It was like kissing . . . a post. (Don't worry — it's gotten better.) I understand why — she was afraid. She did not yet have faith in me. So her kiss was impure (infected with fear), and her kiss lacked passion (fear guarded her heart). So that kiss ranks at just about the *very bottom* of my list of kisses.

Tribulation comes, but for us Christians that shouldn't mean fear. What *does* it mean? In the midst of the bowls of wrath, right before the great earthquake, the voice from the temple calls out, "Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed [happy] is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

I used to dress fast in California, because in my first two encounters with major earthquakes, I was caught naked. (I had just gotten out of the shower.) I still remember the

whole room shaking . . . and me diving into a moving closet, trying to get my pants on, hopping on one foot in a moving room, all so I wouldn't be found naked in the rubble of my fallen world.

And Jesus says, "Be ready. Always keep your clothes *with* you."

Some people think that means underground bunkers, survival gear, stashes of food . . . But Jesus isn't talking about physical clothing. (You can take a shower in *peace . . . relax . . .*) Paul tells us we are to "put on Christ."

In Revelation 19, the fine linen is the "righteous deeds of the saints." Our righteous deeds are the fruit of faith. Remember in Revelation 14, good deeds are Christ's righteousness on us. We are to clothe ourselves with faith, not fear. With fear, Satan tempts us to cover our naked shame from the wrath of God. But with faith, Christ covers our shame with His righteousness.

Fear closes our hearts, but faith opens our hearts.

Jesus doesn't just want our bodies; He wants our hearts. If He only has our bodies, He has purchased a whore. If He has our hearts *and* our bodies, He has won a bride.

In the Koran, women are like property. "They are a man's field," says Muhammad. Men may own them as slaves, and men may acquire them with wealth. In much of Islam then, it appears as if a woman's heart doesn't matter. Her wishes don't really matter.

One contemporary Muslim scholar wrote, "Sexual intercourse is an action, and the woman does not act." Undoubtedly that sentiment is behind the practice of female circumcision and female genital mutilation. The pleasure is for the man, not for the woman.

I think Jesus calls that rape . . . surrender by fear. Islam means “submission” . . . “surrender” . . . but it’s surrender in fear. (By the way, that’s the *lan*, which is a much larger religion than just Islam.)

In Islam, men get many virgins to have sex with in Heaven. In Christianity, we *are* the Bride, who has surrendered in love. And our Lord will not ravish us until He has won our heart. For in His furious love, our pleasure is His pleasure, and our sorrows are His sorrows. So He longs for our kisses . . . but only if they are freely given.

Do you see the suffering of Jesus? His Bride has gone to bed with the Evil One, and she thinks it’s *life*. He comes to set her free, and the Evil One fills her with fear. He must rescue her from the Evil One and also win her heart. He crushes the Evil One with power but must say to His Bride, “As you wish.” For kisses surrendered in fear have no value to Him.

In Afghanistan, we’re dropping bombs . . . and we’re dropping food. I’m so proud of my country. Although the U.S. is terribly infected with sin, and although I understand that food drops are politically expedient, I do believe it’s a faint reflection of Jesus.

Afghan women are seeing their world destroyed, but it’s an evil world. And the one destroying it is sending them food. So maybe the bombs don’t mean they’re being attacked, but they’re being rescued. That’s a weak analogy, but tribulation means, “Bride of Christ, you’re being rescued.” For the One who calls to the angels to pour out the bowls of wrath, which destroy your old world, is the One who feeds you bread from Heaven.

That manna in your wilderness is His body broken. And with His blood, you wash your garments white (Revelation 7). Now He calls, “Keep your garments ready.” In Revelation 19, the garment is white linen . . . the righteous deeds of the saints . . . and it *is* what the Bride

wears. It is a *wedding dress*. He comes to elope! He wants to marry you! But only “as you wish.”

With joyful hope, can you say, “Come, Lord Jesus”? That’s the last line of Revelation (before John’s benediction). Throughout Revelation, Jesus keeps saying, “I’m coming.” We keep answering with fear. But He is the Great Lover, so in the end we finally say in faith, “Come, Lord Jesus.” He must answer, “As you wish,” for that’s the end.

He does not want a frightened harlot; He wants a Bride full of faith, hope, and love.

What does it mean then when bombs are exploding, and giants are loose, and the castle is being stormed? It means you’re being rescued. You’re being rescued by your heart’s deepest desire. You’re being rescued by *True Love*.

Remember the movie I told you of? The pirate that captures the maiden? The maiden’s name is Buttercup. The pirate is the Dread Pirate Roberts, who is actually her true love Westley, who has crossed the sea, fought the Spaniard and the giant, and outwitted Vesini to reach her. But now he’s testing her heart, for she has been betrothed to the evil Prince Humperdink.

So he accuses her of faithlessness for her betrothal to Humperdink. She cries, “I *died* that day. And you can die too!” And she pushes him down a steep hill. As he falls he cries, “As . . . you . . . wish . . .” Buttercup realizes it’s Westley, her true love, and she flings herself down the hill to die with him. She’s the Princess Bride, and so are we.

As you know, they get separated again, but the whole movie is about Westley winning Buttercup’s heart—Buttercup’s faith. For in the beginning, Buttercup’s heart is arrogant. She orders Westley around until she realizes that when he says, “As you wish,” he is really saying, “I love you.”

At one point, Westley dies. But he’s only “mostly

dead.” So he’s resurrected by Miracle Max for true love. He plans to storm Humperdink’s castle where Buttercup is once again tempted to marry Humperdink out of fear. Before the wedding, she has a dream that wakens her.

She dreams of marrying Humperdink, and she dreams of an old woman in the crowd who keeps yelling, “Boo! Boo!” Buttercup asks, “Why do you do this?” The old woman says, “Because you had love in your hands and you gave it up!”

“But they would have killed Westley if I hadn’t done it!” Buttercup responds.

“Your true love lives, and you marry another!” cries the old woman. “True love saved her in the fire swamp, and she treated it like garbage. And that’s what she is, the Queen of Refuse. So bow down to her if you want. Bow to her. Bow to the Queen of Slime, the Queen of Filth, the Queen of Putrescence! Boo! Boo! Rubbish! Filth! Slime! Muck! Boo! Boo! Boo!”

The dream is fear (her fear), but Buttercup wakes to faith.

Bride of Christ, True Love has saved you from the fire swamp (Lake of Fire). True Love lives, and you have treated it like garbage. But He *will not* let you go. You will not marry another. Wake up and live now.

On Buttercup’s wedding day, the castle is stormed, and Buttercup is saved. The moral of the movie is, true love *always conquers* . . . just as Westley said at the first to Buttercup: “Hear this now, I will always come for you.” She asks, “How can you be sure?” He replies, “This is true love.”

You say, “That’s a fairy tale.” *Yes*. “It’s not real life.” *Wrong*. It is real life invading unreal life (this world). It’s the revelation of St. John. Jesus always wins.

You say: “Well, why this life? Why the struggle? Why the tribulation? Why history?”

At the end of *The Princess Bride*, as dawn rises, Westley and Buttercup kiss. And the narrator says, “Since the invention of the kiss, there had been five kisses that were rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind. THE END.”

If you’ve been asking lately, “What does God want?” Jesus told us in John 4:23 that God seeks true worshippers, “proskuneo” in Greek. Scholars agree: that basically means “a good kiss.”

He is coming soon. When He arrives, may you say to Him in perfect faith without fear, “As you wish.”

Further Reading

“Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!”)

-Revelation 16:15

In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

-Exodus 12:11-13

“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure”--for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

-Revelation 19:7-8

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen. . . . But know this,

that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. . . ."

-Matthew 22:11-14; 24:43-25:13

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

-Galatians 3:27-29

Your wives are your field: go in, therefore, to your field as ye will And it is for the women to act as they (the husbands) act by them, in all fairness; but the men are a step above them. God is mighty, wise. Ye may divorce your wives twice. . . . But if the husband divorce her *a third time*, it is not lawful for him to take her again, until she shall have married another husband And if ye are apprehensive that ye shall not deal fairly with orphans, then, of *other* women who seem good in your eyes, marry *but* two, or three, or four; and if ye *still* fear that ye shall not act equitably, then one only; or the slaves whom ye have acquired: this will make justice on your part easier. . . . *Forbidden to you* also are married women, except those who are in your hands as slaves: This is the law of God for you. And it is allowed you, beside this, to seek out wives by means of your wealth, with modest conduct, and without fornication. . . . Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them.

-*The Koran*, 2:223, 228, 230; 4:3, 29, 38

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church .

...

-Ephesians 5:25, 31-32

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. . . . I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. . . .”

-John 14:1-3, 18

“For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

-Matthew 16:27-28

And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

-Luke 23:42-43

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

-Revelation 16:1

History consists of parables whereby God communicates in terms that the imagination rather than the mind, faith rather than knowledge, can grasp. You know, there are many pleasures in being old and gaga. One of the greatest of them is to realize that history is largely nonsensical. How does this come about? Because when you get to be into your middle seventies, events and situations and circumstances that you

very vividly and clearly remember are already history. Yet when you read them written as history they are completely and utterly unconvincing, with no possible resemblance to what you remember as the original on which they are based. So you have the pleasure of knowing that you need not bother in any way about history. The only reason for studying what goes on is to get at this parable that it conveys. Otherwise it is just like an interminable soap opera whose situations endlessly recur although the characters change.

-Malcolm Muggeridge

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

-Philippians 4:4-7

Neither can one who wills the Good do so out of fear of punishment. In essence, this is the same thing as willing the Good for the sake of a reward. The one who wills in truth one thing fears only doing wrong, not the punishment. In fact, he who does wrong, yet sincerely wills the Good, actually desires to face the consequences – so that the punishment, like medicine, may heal him. He understands that punishment only exists for the sake of the sinner. It is a helping hand. It goads one to press on further toward the Good, if one really wills it. On the other hand, the one who is divided considers punishment or hardship as a sickness. He fears all worldly setback for there is nothing eternal in him.

True, fear deceptively offers to help us. It too offers

to keep us on the right track. Yet the one who strives in fear never becomes God's friend. Fear is a deceitful aid. It can sour your delight, make life arduous and miserable, make you old and decrepit; but it is never able to help you toward the Good. The Good will not tolerate any alien helper.

Those who live in fear may indeed desire heaven but not for itself. . . . Only one thing can help us to will the Good in truth: the Good itself.

-Soren Kierkegaard

Also Read: I Thessalonians 5:1-6; Matthew 26:64; Revelation 1:7, 2:25, 22:7, 12, 20

The Harlot Washed in the Prince's Blood

How to Make a Bride

(Revelation 17)

A few weeks ago at the Living Stone Service, Marcia Hinds stood up and shared a vision—a picture—that she received during the worship service. She said, “The calling upon Lookout Mountain is to express the creativity in our hearts.”

A few days after that, I was surprised to find out that our speaker for the church retreat, McNair Wilson, was speaking on this topic: “Recapturing Your Creative Spirit: Finding Our Place in God’s Plan.” This past weekend, many of you were there as McNair shared insights into being a creative person.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and as the final act of creation He said, “Let us make man in our own image and likeness.” Many theologians argue that the image of God is to be a creator, as He is a creator.

Well, Marcia described her vision at the Living Stone Service. I love it when folks get visions and not only words, because it’s obvious the vision is more than they know. I think it must have been like that with John in the Revelation. Scholars wonder at John’s skill and artistry in crafting the Revelation, but John didn’t paint the picture. The *Lamb* painted the picture, and John just described it.

Marcia described this enormous canvas. It’s opening scene on one side displayed the words “In the beginning, God created.” The ending scene was the New Jerusalem. In the middle, where she expected to see the cross, was the Lamb upon His throne. Throughout the canvas were pictures that depicted the lives of God’s people.

I've been chewing on that picture (perhaps a scroll), thinking about the beginning and the end. We're studying the end in the Revelation. From here on out, the end is dominated by two women separated by the Lamb and one thousand years of His reign.

The two women are the Great Harlot (the Whore of Babylon) and the Bride (the New Jerusalem). The New Jerusalem is the end. Does the end have anything to do with the beginning?

Paul writes, "God accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will." That means that the end *must* have something to do with the beginning. And your life is not Plan B, because there *is* no Plan B. It's all Plan A, and you must be an integral part of the whole story.

Genesis is about you; Revelation is about you.

"And everything that was written in the past was written to teach us" (Romans 15). For we are the Israel of God, children of Abraham by faith, true Jews circumcised in heart, the temple of the Living God, the Bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem coming down.

So it's not like this American Pop Theology of the last hundred years that makes the Church a parenthesis in God's plan for the geo-political state of Israel. The Church is not a parenthesis in another plan. The Church is the crowning pinnacle of God's creation. Paul said, "For [God] made Christ head over all things for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). The end has everything to do with the beginning and with *you* right now.

In the beginning (Genesis 1-2:3), God creates *everything* in six days. The last thing created (the pinnacle of creation, God's dream of creation) was man "in His image." Then God rests on the seventh day, because all creation is

finished.

We modern people tend to read that story simply as “seven days” long ago. But there’s a huge problem with that: God is still creating. He’s not finished. Paul even said in I Corinthians 15 that we’re still being made into His image, the image of Christ (the Second Adam). We’re still being made into the kind of creator that Christ is. Remember, Christ called from His cross, “It is finished.” Did God say, “Excuse me . . . *actually* it was finished back there on the seventh day”?

In Hebrews, we read that God rested on the seventh day, but we are called to enter His rest *now*. So did Christ enter God’s rest at the cross? Did Christ finish God’s creating on His cross? Are we finally perfected in His image through the cross, not just at a point in time, but when we carry His cross each day?

If so, it means we’re still living in the sixth day, still being made into the image of God. And then those seven days of Genesis cover all of time, the whole canvas. Seven churches, seven days, seven seals, seven bowls, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven eyes of the Lamb, seven heads of the Beast . . . That’s more than just counting. It’s saying, “These are the days of time, the days in which we live.”

We’re being painted in time, but the canvas is finished in eternity. So we have been made and are being made in His image.

Now, you may say, “Seven days is *seven days*, and I take the Bible *literally!*” (Sometimes I think that means we take the Bible *scientifically* rather than *spiritually*, by sight rather than by faith.) Well . . . how long is seven days? Are you traveling at the speed of light? Where are you standing?

Gerald Schroeder, a physicist from MIT, decided to calculate the age of the universe from the point of the Big Bang, because modern science has demonstrated that time is

relative to changes in gravity and velocity. So calculating the mass of the universe and the rate of expansion, Schroeder's figures indicated that from the earth looking back at creation, the universe would appear to be 15 3/4 billion years old. However, from creation—the beginning—looking out at the earth, the universe would appear to be not quite . . . seven days old. We are living in the sixth day, still being made in God's image.

Well, Genesis 1-2:3 describes the seven days and God's dream of creation: "Let us make man in our own image and likeness." But then in Genesis 2:4, the author goes back to day six. He begins to describe how God made man. I believe the rest of the Bible is day six until some women go to a tomb early one Sunday morning, and the stone is rolled away, and Easter—eternity—day seven—begins to invade history.

But day seven—Heaven—never fully invades all space and time until the end of the Revelation when the people of God say, "Come, Lord Jesus," and He says, "As you wish." It's the consummated, finished kingdom of God, for His Bride is ready—finished—fully created. It's the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

How *is* the Bride made ready?

In Genesis 2, God makes the Garden, and God says, "Eat not of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The day you eat of it you will die." Then God sees the first thing which he pronounces "not good." In the words of Milton, that thing is *loneliness*. He said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper fit [suitable] for him."

A helper. Who is your helper, Christian?

Then He brought to Adam every beast and every bird. They're each male and female (I would imagine) . . . each has a partner, each has a likeness, each has a helper through whom more life will be created. Animals are created after their kind. But Adam is alone.

It's like God asks: "Who's your helper, Adam? In whose likeness are you, Adam? Who will create through you, Adam? To whom will you cleave, Adam? As you wish, Adam."

"But Adam did not find a helper suitable for him." (Now, this is a deep mystery, but how could he find his helper? He did not yet know good and evil, and his helper is the Good.)

So God begins the great lesson. He puts Adam to sleep, and He takes a rib from his side and fashions it into Eve. Women, don't be offended, for you *were* Adam, and he was you. Up to this point, Adam was a he-she. So far, when I've said "Adam," I was talking about you too, women. Together, male and female, we are in the image of God. Adam was a he-she.

So when Adam sees Eve, he says, "Hey! That's my rib! Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She is me!" And she really was.

The helper Adam got was more of himself. And the helper Eve got was more of herself. In Ephesians, Paul writes that this male-female thing in Genesis 2 is a picture, a lesson, about something else.

You see, the helper Adam picks is more of himself. And some help *she* turns out to be! The first thing she does is help him find some fruit. She talks to a snake. But both Adam and Eve are present, and not only is Eve a lousy helper for Adam, but Adam is a lousy helper for Eve.

Adam is Eve, Eve is Adam, and we're just not good at helping ourselves.

The snake says, “Hey, this fruit will make you like God, knowing good and evil.” The thing is, it *does*. For God even says, “Behold, they have become like us, knowing good and evil.” Isn’t that God’s dream? His likeness? Yet Adam and Eve sinned.

They are kicked out of the Garden, sentenced to death, and they find themselves alone. They sinned. How did they sin? Wasn’t it God’s dream of creation to create them in His likeness? Yes, it was God’s dream, but they tried to create *themselves* without help. If God wanted them to know good and evil (like Him), perhaps He would have given them that fruit another way. (I don’t know; it’s a mystery.) But independent of God, they took the fruit and consumed the fruit. Not just *like* God . . . they tried to *be* God.

More than God, they wanted God’s stuff . . . consumers. More than His *self*—His *heart*—they wanted His attributes. Instead of trusting God to create them in His image, they trusted themselves to create themselves in His image. Instead of trusting their helper, they trusted themselves and they trusted a snake. Instead of a bride, humanity had become a whore . . . a consumer rather than a creator.

But that was *still day six*, and God will *still* have His dream. And God *still* “accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will.” And God was *still* making man in His image, according to plan. And God is *still* asking, “Who’s your helper?”

The next time that word “helper” appears in my English Bible is a few thousand years later. A desperate man named David (hardly a model citizen, but a royal catastrophe) wrote, “Oh Lord, be my helper.” And God called him a man after His own heart.

A thousand years later, another man, a son of David

and the Son of God (Jesus, who referred to Himself as the “parakletos”—the “helper”) said, “I am going, but I will send you another helper. You already know Him, for He is with you and will be in you.”

Jesus referred to us as His Bride saying, “Apart from me you can do nothing. But abide in me and I in you and so bear much fruit.” That is, create *much fruit*—God’s dream of creation, His Bride, man in His own image and likeness.

REVELATION 17:1: *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations.” And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*

When I saw her I marveled greatly. But the angel said to me, “Why marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition; and the dwellers

on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition. And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast; they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

And he said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the harlot; they will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and giving over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

There is a *whole lot* in that chapter, but did you notice Satan’s kingdom consumes itself? The Beast consumes the Harlot—a consumer kingdom.

In verse fourteen, those with Christ conquer the

Beast! Remember — that was the huge question at the start of the book: “Who will conquer? Who will eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God? Who will not be hurt by the second death? Who receives the morning star and will be clad in white garments? Who will be the temple, the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God? Who will sit with Christ on His throne? Who will *conquer*?” Here’s the answer: *Those with Christ . . .* for He is their helper.

We’ve already preached on the Beast. But now John is “amazed” at the Harlot. The word can even mean “attracted.” It’s clear the Harlot is evil yet attractive. (That’s how harlots are.) She loves men for their attributes but not for themselves. She loves men as food to consume. The Beast exercises power over men through intimidation. The Harlot exercises power over men through seduction. In the next chapter, we find God’s people have been seduced.

People argue forever about who exactly the Whore is . . .

In verse five, she’s **Babylon**.

In verse nine, she sits on seven mountains like **Rome**. In verse eighteen she *is* (as John writes) the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth. (She’s *at least* Rome and Babylon.)

In verse six, she’s drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs. That best fits **Jerusalem**. (Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D., utterly destroyed by the Roman Beast, as Jesus prophesied.) It’s clear this woman is the antithesis of the New Jerusalem, so maybe this is the Old Jerusalem. Remember, it was the Old Jerusalem that killed Jesus. They had a dream of Messiah who would liberate the geo-political entity of Israel from the dominion of Rome. And when He did not do that, they killed him. They wanted an independent Jewish State. They wanted the blessings of God, not the *person* of God. So when the *person* of God showed up, they killed Him.

Amazingly, some Christians are all worried about blessing the state of Israel so they can be blessed. That sounds like harlotry and the spirit that got Jesus crucified.

In Jesus' day, Jerusalem was infected with consumer religion. So Jesus went into the temple and drove out the merchants and moneychangers in an absolute fury, like a man who has found another man in his wife's bed. He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days." And He *did*. I'm looking at it.

Harlotry is the pinnacle of consumerism. It's buying and selling life—consuming life. When you pay for a person, you make them worth a finite amount, something you can pay. You make them part of your own portfolio, your own kingdom. But then everything in your kingdom is less than you . . . dead . . . and you're alone. That's the end of consumerism.

If you consume everything, purchase everything, own everything, everything is dead. You can pay for idols, but do you think you can *acquire God*? Acquire the blessings of God, the attributes of God, like plucking fruit from a tree? To dream of buying God is to dream your own death, God's death, and the world's death. It's to dream of Hell.

Harlotry is trying to get with human energy what only God can give through grace. Harlotry is choosing a dead lover, an unsuitable helper.

As I read the Revelation, the Beast doesn't really scare me; the Dragon's not even that big of a deal. But the Harlot really makes me nervous . . . because I find her attractive. She looks a lot like home: A world economy in bed with the kings of the earth, the great consumer culture. She looks an awful lot like America.

We Americans think we can buy and sell anything, even kings, friends, and enemies (around the world). We have come to view each other as consumer items. So we

consume wives and consume husbands. It's even the way we date in America. We *shop* for love.

I watched *Happy Days* in high school, so I dated around. Girls were like a consumer item: you shopped around and got the best you could, for you obtained her attributes and she increased your value.

In my ninth grade year, I dumped a wonderful girl named Erin, because I could get *Lisa*. (I didn't even *know* Lisa, but she was a cheerleader . . . more valuable than Pom-Pom Girl, and almost a Liberty Bell!) I was a soccer player, and I had a cheerleader, and I was *making myself*.

During my tenth grade year, Lisa dumped me . . . I got cut from the soccer team. Then suddenly Erin became really attractive. In fact, I found girls to be very attractive until I *had* them. Then they would lose their luster.

By the eleventh grade, I was dating a girl named Susan, who was absolutely gorgeous until I thought I owned her heart. Then she would lose her magic. We would break up, and then once again I couldn't live without her. You see, every time I thought I had her, I turned her into a harlot in my heart. It was during my senior year that I began thinking, "Maybe a bride isn't a consumer item. When I possess her as a consumer item, she dies. Maybe a bride is more like something I *serve*, and in serving I create."

So many Americans are getting divorced saying, "My husband or wife wasn't what I thought they would be. I'm returning the merchandise." If that's you, it reveals you didn't really marry a husband or wife. You thought you purchased a harlot. Your husband or wife is not a consumer item. They are not to be *consumed*, but *created*. And we learn that in marriage.

In Ephesians 5, Paul quotes Genesis 2 about God making Adam male and female. He says, "This mystery is a profound one, and it refers to Christ and His Church."

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the

church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). *Finished.*

Christ creates His Bride—His people—by washing her with His Word—His Gospel—His very own body broken and blood shed. He washes her because she’s ugly. She’s become a whore. She knows good and evil because she’s chosen evil. She’s sold out to evil. But with His own flesh and blood He makes her—He creates her—to choose the good—Himself—her helper—her wish.

In Patterson, California, two American teenagers, Felipe Garza and Donna Ashlock, dated. They dated until Donna began dating another boy. One day Donna doubled over in pain. Doctors soon discovered she was dying of a degenerative heart disease and desperately needed a heart transplant. Felipe heard about Donna’s condition and told his mother, “I’m going to die, and I’m going to give my heart to my girlfriend.”

Boys say crazy things, and Felipe appeared to his mom to be in perfect health. Three weeks later Felipe woke up and complained of pain on the left side of his head. He began losing his breath and couldn’t walk. He was taken to the hospital. He had had an aneurysm. Soon he was brain dead.

His sudden death mystified his doctors. While he remained on the respirator, his family decided to let physicians remove his heart for Donna and his kidneys and eyes for others in need. After Donna received the transplant, her father told her of Felipe’s death. He said, “Felipe donated his kidneys and eyes.” There was a pause, and Donna said, “And I have his heart.”

Imagine if you received a new heart from someone

who loved you like that! Chad Miller writes, “Every moment you lived would be a tribute to the one who loved you so much he gave his life for you.” I imagine Donna loved Felipe with all her new heart. If only he’d rise from the dead, what a bride Donna would be!

In chapter seventeen, the Harlot is drunk on blood. In chapter nineteen, the Bride has been washed in blood (the Lamb’s life).

The Harlot is decked with jewels, gold, and pearls.
The Bride *is* jewels, gold, and pearls.

The Harlot is the abode of demons.
The Bride is the dwelling place of God.

The Harlot is a city, an economy of consumption.
The Bride is a city, an economy of creation.

The Harlot consumes, and she is a consumer finally consumed in the Lake of Fire. The Great Harlot is the *spirit* of harlotry.

But God loves harlots: Rahab, Mary of Magdalene, *you* (His people) . . . Don’t you see His plan for the fullness of time is to take harlots (the children of Adam) and turn them into His Bride?

A friend heard Jesus whisper these words one evening in our worship service: “I love you. I love the whores, the murderers, the adulterers, but especially the whores.”

We all were whores loving other gods, other lords. But Christ makes us His Bride. In Ezekiel 16, God says Jerusalem is a harlot, a whoring bride. He says, “I will deliver you to be burned by your lovers, but then I will

establish with you my everlasting covenant. I will atone for your sins.” That atonement is His body and blood.

Hosea is commanded to marry a harlot because Israel is a harlot. Hosea is commanded to redeem her—buy her back for fifteen shekels.

Jesus has purchased you from the Evil One with His own blood. There is no greater price. Jesus creates His Bride with His own flesh and blood. God creates His people in His image by ripping His own heart from His chest and placing it in a manger, then nailing it to a cross. In John 1, “Jesus is the Word from the bosom of the father.”

Remember that the Revelation is somehow a scroll . . . a canvas. And it’s only opened by the Lamb on the throne.

The Revelation of His Bride is purchased with His blood. She is created with blood.

Marcia said, “We are all creative and all called to creativity, whether it’s singing, hospitality, administration, prayer.” In the middle of that canvas, she saw the Lamb. He was on the throne. Remember, He appears “as one who has been slain.” He paints with His own blood. He paints *us*. On the canvas, she saw *us*, Lookout Mountain Community Church, in poor villages around the world, in the inner city, shining His light.

She said the canvas began to beat in tempo with God’s heartbeat. God showed Marcia that the canvas was wrapped around His heart. “So, Lookout Mountain,” she said, “you have a calling on your heart to live out your creativity.”

Our creativity is His creativity, for He has given us His heart. When you surrender to Jesus, when you love like Jesus, the heart of God beats in your chest, and you create in the image of God. When you rely on yourself and try to become self-actualized, you create death. You play the harlot.

Who is your helper? Then stop playing the Harlot. If you name the name of Jesus, don't let the Evil One lie to you. You're not the Harlot. You're His Bride.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Further Reading

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” . . . In the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. . . . then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” -Genesis 1:26-28; 2:4b; 2:18-3:1

“Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me; O LORD, be my helper.”

-Psalm 30:10

(David, the man after God’s own heart)

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. . . .”

-John 14:16-18

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church

-Ephesians 5:25-32

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” . . . “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the

glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"--for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

-Revelation 7:13-14, 19:7-8

When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD." . . . The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you." For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

-Hosea 1:2, 3:1-5

Again the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your navel string was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor swathed with bands. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you; but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on

the day that you were born. And when I passed by you, and saw you weltering in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live, and grow up like a plant of the field.' And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. . . . But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by. . . . Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because your shame was laid bare and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotries with your lovers, and because of all your idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them, therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you loathed; I will gather them against you from every side, and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. And I will judge you as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. And I will give you into the hand of your lovers, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places; they shall strip you of your clothes and take your fair jewels, and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a host against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women; I will make you stop playing the harlot, and you shall also give hire no more. . . . As I live, says the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous

ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them, when I saw it. . . . Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD”

-Ezekiel 16:1-8, 15, 35-41, 48-50, 59-62

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. . . .”

-Revelation 21:1-3a

In loving me, you made me loveable.

-Augustine

Loving the Bride

Leaving the Harlot

(Revelation 18-19:8)

This sermon is really a continuation of last week's sermon (and actually all those that have come before). The Revelation is one incredible picture. Last week we preached from Genesis through Revelation about God's dream of creation: creators in His image. And we preached of the Bride and the Harlot.

Harlotry is the pinnacle of consumption—an “economy of consumption,” and harlotry is a great lie—a deception. It is the belief that one can purchase something which only comes by grace.

God created sexuality as a sacramental communion of grace. The groom goes into his bride to commune with her in love, and in the process he implants his seed in her womb—*his life*. She bears life—creation—in the image of God. Sexuality is to be “life given” and “life created.” And God designed it to be *pure ecstasy*.

Harlotry is a lie. It promises communion, life, and ecstasy, but . . .

Instead of surrender, it is control;

Instead of giving, it is taking;

Instead of creation, it is consumption;

Instead of ecstasy, it ends in depravity and tragedy;

Instead of communion, it ends in isolation and death.

Harlotry uses *people* to obtain *things*; love uses *things* to serve *people*. Harlotry is consumption; love is creation.

Harlotry ends in dead hearts alone in their own private hell.

So there really are *no happy hookers*.

In Revelation 17, we meet the Great Harlot. She's not happy, but drunk with blood. She rides the Beast; she is dependent on the Beast and his kings, and they are dependent on her. They are using each other, so they *bate* each other. In the end, the Beast burns her and makes her fall.

She is world economy dependent on a unified political authority. She is world trade dependent on United Nations. She is a goddess who preaches liberty but practices licentiousness. She is a goddess who preaches freedom that is really bondage to evil.

Who is the Harlot? Well, she's **Babylon** . . . Babel in Genesis, where they built a tower to conquer Heaven. Babel is a tower that falls.

She's also **Rome**. Peter even refers to Rome as Babylon in I Peter 5. World trade flourished under Roman Empirical power. The Mediterranean Sea became a free trade zone. (This then is quite a picture: John the Apostle, old and exiled to Patmos by the Empire of Rome, sings a funeral dirge over Roman culture in the height of its glory.)

The Harlot also appears to be **Old Jerusalem**. Jerusalem fell suddenly, *crushed* by the Roman Beast in 70 A.D. She was called a harlot by God, because the people of God had sold out to other gods—*idolatry*.

When the voice cries in chapter eighteen, "Come out of her, my people," it sounds like Jesus. Remember that Jesus warned His disciples in Jerusalem to flee the city at the sign of its destruction. History shows that, in fact, they *did*.

In Revelation 17, John describes the Great Harlot, how she's destroyed by the Beast. In Revelation 18, he sings a funeral dirge over her destruction. Who is she?

REVELATION 18:1-3: *After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird; for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion . . ."*

"Porneias" in Greek means fornication, impure passion, harlotries. "Pornos" is "harlot" or "whore." All these words are from the same root — porn.

The United States of American is the world's number one producer of porn . . . something like a \$10 billion a year industry. Especially now with the Internet, all the nations of the world are drunk with our porn.

Do you use porn? "If you look on a woman with lust, you commit adultery in your heart," Jesus said. Sex for money or sex simply for pleasure (sex for consumption, sex outside the covenant of marriage) is "porneias."

" . . . and the kings of the earth have committed fornication [porneias] with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness."

Our economy runs on "wantonness." We call it "consumer confidence." This was a recent perfume ad in the window at Macy's:

You want it. You want it bad. Sometimes so

much it hurts. You can taste it. You feel like you would do anything to get it. Go further than they'd suspect. Twist your soul and crush what's in your way. Then you get it. And something happens. You become the object of your desire. And it feels incredible.

Does it? Throwing licentious parties for herself alone in the dark — The Great Whore.

“The merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness.” I bet more people around the world have tasted Coca-Cola than communion wine. But that only stands to reason, for “Coke is the real thing.”

REVELATION 18:4-7: *Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven . . .”*

. . . heaped like bricks in the Tower of Babel, heaped in order to seize eternity with human energy . . .

“ . . . and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and played the wanton [that is, gave herself luxuries] . . .”

I read that if we could shrink the earth's population

to a village of one hundred people, one-half of the village would suffer from malnutrition, one-half of the village's wealth would be in the hands of only six citizens, and all six would be American. I don't know how accurate that is, but I do know that minimum wage in the Dominican Republic is \$28.00 a week. That's really good considering that over 1 billion people subsist on the equivalent of less than \$1.00 a day . . . like in Mozambique.

In Mozambique, infant mortality is almost one-fifth of the live births, 172 of 1,000. In the U.S., it's 1 of 100.

"But man shall not live on bread alone but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." His Word is life.

In the early 90's, it was reported that Americans spent 140 times as much on legalized gambling as overseas Protestant ministries. And we spent 17 times as much on diets and diet-related products. That is, while billions of unsaved people starved, we paid already wealthy people to help us not eat . . . at a rate of 17 to 1 . . . diets over the Word. We're still some of the fattest people on earth. And a little preaching might have gone a long way in Afghanistan about ten years ago. . . .

REVELATION 18:7: "*. . . so give her a like measure of torment and mourning. Since in her heart she says, 'A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see' . . .*"

The Harlot has become *so arrogant* in her wealth she thinks she will never see suffering. "Health and wealth" theology is really strong in America: Our riches mean God's approval. This whole Pre-tribulation Rapture thing is really a recent American phenomenon. The idea is, God *surely*

wouldn't let His chosen people suffer great tribulation.

So I guess that means those martyrs in the Sudan weren't chosen . . . And *of course* we're supposed to "pick up our cross and follow." In fact, you can get a nice gold-plated one on a chain at Macy's for \$49.95 . . .

REVELATION 18:8-13: "*. . . so shall her plagues come in a single day, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she shall be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.*"

And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgment come."

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

In my country, white people are still far richer than black people. Don't be fooled. There is a reason for that . . . slavery.

And if I understand Scripture correctly, my country has systematically and hygienically aborted something like 38 million human souls since 1973.

Loneliness is longing for human souls.

REVELATION 18:14-23: *“The fruit for which thy soul longed has gone from thee, and all thy dainties and thy splendor are lost to thee, never to be found again!”*

The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, “Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste.” And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, “What city was like the great city?” And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, “Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! In one hour she has been laid waste. Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!”

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea . . .

Jesus said, “It would be better to have a millstone tied around your neck and cast into the sea than to lead one of these little ones astray.” In my children’s school, it is illegal to talk about God. Life is explained through consumption, “survival of the fittest.” Any biologist has to admit that doesn’t explain life; it explains death. Have you ever tried to teach World History without referring to Jesus?

Of necessity it forces you to lie and lead children astray . . .

A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more; and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman of any craft shall be found in thee no more; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more; and the light of a lamp shall shine in thee no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in thee no more; for thy merchants were the great men of the earth, and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery [magic spell]."

By graduation, the average American teenager has seen 350,000 TV commercials, amounting to one and one-half years of eight-hour work days. Not just Americans, but all nations are sucked into our economy through commercials. It's how we rule the world . . . our magic spell. And how do they work?

Remember this one? "Is that me holding you or you holding me? I cannot tell where you begin and I end. *Eternity*." What are they selling? — perfume. What can you say about perfume? — It smells good. What do they promise? — eternal communion.

Now in *Eternity* commercials they show children running down a beach . . . eternal communion that bears life. And all it really is, is *smelly water*. That's a lying promise, a magic spell, harlotry . . . and it works, for we buy the stuff.

REVELATION 18:24: "*And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have*

been slain on earth.”

Prophets and saints bled for a vision of a country, blessed like old Israel . . . “Blessed in order to be a blessing.” That’s the Protestant work ethic: Work with God to create for others, instead of working alone to consume in the dark.

It may look the same on the outside, but its dream is creation not consumption . . . It runs on *Creator* confidence, not *consumer* confidence . . . It runs on *fullness* not *emptiness*, *giving* instead of *getting* . . . Israel was *blessed* in order to be a blessing, but they turned their blessings into idols.

I was listening to a secular rock song and heard these lyrics:

Only in America
We’re slaves to be free
Only in America we kill the unborn
To make ends meet
Only in America
Sexuality is democracy
Only in America we stamp our god
“In God We Trust”

[Creed]

And it’s illegal in the public education system to mention just who we think God might be. That means many children first read of God on a dollar bill.

What have you been mourning since September 11? I hope it is towers filled with priceless human souls for whom Christ died. But perhaps it is towers that represent an idol, our consumer lifestyle. . . towers of Babel.

You see, my heart is awfully invested in Babylon. God may be trying to remind me of something. So this is not an easy sermon to preach, but I’m scared not to preach

it.

For while we were preaching through the Revelation, right after we spoke of the Beast as the nation of Islam, planes flew into the Twin Towers (the World Trade Center) right down the street from the United Nations, in the Great City. We watched them fall in one hour behind a statue on the waters, the goddess of liberty, whose liberty has become license. And the next week's text that I was to preach on in Revelation announces the fall of "Babel-on," for the Beast will attack and burn her with fire.

God might actually be sending us a message, even at the hands of the godless Beast. And the message is, "Repent." Whenever Israel encountered disaster, their immediate temptation was arrogance. "We're God's people!" But God's message was always the same: "Repent!"

Well, the U.S. is *not Israel*, but the Church is Israel. We may be living in the most dangerous place on earth, but not because of terrorists. Jesus calls, "Come out of her, my people," and we call back, "Well, we actually kind of *like* it here."

We're like dieters who work in a doughnut shop; like alcoholics who work in a liquor store. Is anything wrong with doughnuts and alcohol—the goods of this world? *No!* In fact, donuts can be used to save a starving man, and alcohol can be communion. But if you're a fat, alcoholic idolater, hanging around doughnut shops and liquor stores can be dangerous!

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

In America? Yeah, right.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

In America? That's tough.

And to the extent America is a hooker, she's an unhappy hooker. For prostitution leaves you violated, alone, and mortally depressed. Some sociologists claim America is

the most violent country on earth. Mother Teresa said several times, "The greatest poverty is in the west." She was talking about loneliness.

The suicide rate for youth in our country has tripled since the 1950's. Yet we are all worked up over Anthrax, because four or five people have died. Since September 11, if statistical rates stay constant, about 6,000 Americans have killed themselves. That's more people than the terrorists killed on September 11! Have you mourned their deaths? They were worse by far. They died feeling like lonely harlots.

So what is God saying? The voice cries, "Come out of her, my people." What does it mean when a man comes out of a harlot? Jesus is saying, "Stop fornicating the whore. She'll suck you dry and leave you desolate. Stop giving your treasure, your heart, your dreams, the deepest longings of your soul, to an economy of consumption. Your heart is only satisfied in me. And I am in the last and least of these, my brethren."

When you're depressed do you go shopping? Jesus calls to you in that moment saying, "Come out of her. She will not give you life."

Well, a man was made to go into a woman and give life. If he is to come out of a whore, into whom is he to give life and make life?

REVELATION 19:1-8: *After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants." Once more they cried, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and*

the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice crying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

In Revelation 21:24 we read, "The kings of the earth bring their glory"—their life, their stuff—"into [the New Jerusalem]," the Bride of Christ. In Revelation 3:21 we read, "The New Jerusalem *is* [present participle] coming down." That means the New Jerusalem has been coming down for 200 years and is currently among us . . . like Jesus said the Kingdom is among us (Luke 17:20). The New Jerusalem is the people of God—the Bride.

Come out of the Whore and go into the Bride . . . with your seed ("sperma" in Greek) if she's your wife . . . with your treasure, heart, time, and money, if she's your church. In other words, use *things* to love *people* and bear much fruit . . . fruit that will not be consumed in the fire but purified for eternity.

If America is the Harlot, America is also the Bride. No country has ever *consumed* as much, and no country has ever *created* as much. We've built hospitals around the world; we've evangelized nations; we've even rescued the world from Hitler in World War II.

America is seduced by the Great Harlot, but she's also salted with the Bride.

At the last Living Stone Service, Philip Yancey shared about his recent visit to New York and Ground Zero. He could not stop talking about how *proud* he was of America. For at Ground Zero he saw the Bride: firemen, policemen, construction workers, sacrificing themselves and pouring their lives into others. He spoke of spontaneous and planned prayer meetings all over the place. People's lives had been changed.

There were three booths set up right across from the site:

POLICEMEN FOR CHRIST

FIREMEN FOR CHRIST

SANITATION WORKERS FOR CHRIST

One of Philip's pastor friends, Gordon McDonald, volunteered with the Salvation Army. In his journal, McDonald wrote of the first night serving at Ground Zero. "In all my years of Christian ministry, [McDonald has ministered to presidents . . . he has written books] I never felt more alive than I felt last night."

Alive — at the foot of a cross? Imagine that! Jesus is there impregnating His surrendered Bride with life, creating His Bride from the rubble of World Trade. The Bride is *in New York City*: the people of God. Some were in the Tower when it fell; some are now searching through the rubble. But the Bride is rising in the Harlot's remains.

God consumes the great spirit of harlotry by turning harlots into brides. His love *is* a consuming fire. God's people were all harlots without Him—idolaters. He creates His Bride from harlots by bleeding for them on His cross, then sending His word to conquer their hearts and

impregnate them with life.

In chapter nineteen, the Word riding a white horse conquers the world. Then the Bride is revealed in all her glory.

We are created to create in His image. It means sacrifice, it means Word—seed—spoken into broken hearts. It hurts, but done in love it's a taste of ecstasy—life. It produces life—the party—the Kingdom—the New Jerusalem—even here. Come out of the Whore and go into the Bride.

Tony Campolo tells about a certain night when he found himself wide awake at 3:30 AM due to jet lag. He was in some U.S. city where he was to speak. But now he was alone—a tempting time for men and for preachers. He walked down to the street and into a dingy, little diner. The fat guy behind the counter shoved him a doughnut and some coffee.

About that time, eight or nine good-looking prostitutes walked in. They sat near Tony. Their talk was loud and very crude. He was just ready to leave when he overheard: “Tomorrow’s my birthday. I’ll be 39.” A second voice said, “So what? What do you want from me? A birthday cake and a Coke? You want me to sing ‘Happy Birthday?’” The first one said, “Come on, why do you have to be so mean? I was just *telling* you, that’s all. I don’t want anything from you. I mean, why should *you* give me a birthday cake? I’ve never had one my whole life.”

Campolo waited until the women left, and he asked the fat guy behind the counter, “Do they come in every night?”

“Yea.”

“How about the one right next to me?”

“Yea, that’s Agnes. Why to you want to know?”

“It’s her birthday tomorrow. What do you say we

throw a party?”

The fat guy thought a minute, smiled, and said, “That’s great. I like Agnes.” His name was Harry. He said, “I’ll bring the cake and spread the word.”

At 2:30 AM the next night, Campolo came back with decorations he had purchased with his time and with his money. He had a big sign that said, “Happy Birthday, Agnes!” At 3:15, it was wall to wall hookers, Harry, and Tony. At 3:30, Agnes arrived. They all screamed, “*Happy Birthday, Agnes!*” And they sang to Agnes.

When Agnes saw the cake, she broke down weeping. Harry said, “Agnes, cut the cake. We want cake!” Finally, Agnes composed herself and said softly as she looked at the cake, “Look, Harry, is it okay if I just look at it a little while?” Harry said, “Sure. Take it home, if you want.” She said, “Oh, can I?” She looked at Tony and said, “I live right down the street. I just want to take it home.” She picked it up like it was the holy grail—the communion cup—and walked out.

At that, no one knew quite what to do. So they all looked at Tony. Being a pastor, Tony said, “Let’s pray.”

So he led them all in prayer to God through Jesus His Son—the Word. He prayed for Agnes, that God would bless her, change her life, and save her. When he was done, Harry leaned over with some hostility and said, “Hey! You never told me you were a *preacher!* What kind of church do you belong to?” Campolo said, “A church that throws parties for hookers at 3:30 in the morning.” Harry said, “No you don’t. There’s no church like that. If there was a church like that, I’d *join* it . . . I’d *join* a church like that.”

There is a church like that: Jesus’ Church. He always got in trouble for partying with tax collectors and sinners . . . prostitutes like Mary Magdalene. But He turns prostitutes into brides.

“There’s no church like that!” I hope *we* are a church

like that. Campolo said his story was partly fictitious, but ours is not . . .

When we go to the Dominican Republic, we usually stay in a place called Rosie's. There are red lights above the doors, and it functions at times like a brothel. Last time Andrew was there, Tom set up a meeting between Andrew and Rosie, and he led her to Christ.

Your giving goes to places like the Dominican Republic and places like Alternatives Pregnancy Center. We help young mothers keep their babies. Who knows all the stories behind those pregnancies?

With your giving, you love people in Mozambique and the Dominican Republic . . . harlots in the mountain, city, and world . . . people like us—people of harlotry, some very literal in their harlotry, some metaphorical in their harlotry, but all harlots apart from Christ, now redeemed by blood and impregnated with life.

We're about to move into our new building. It represents our hearts, money, and treasure, and it may be harlotry if we see ourselves as religious consumers with the building there to service us alone. It may be harlotry that ends in stagnation, loneliness, and death.

But it will be life and the New Jerusalem if we think of it as Harry's Diner—The Harlot's Café. In it we throw parties for harlots and sinners. We not only serve Cokes and cakes to people driving by, but in worship we offer the body and blood of Jesus, who died for His whoring Bride and now impregnates her with life as we surrender to His love.

There was never a more creative moment than when Jesus (betrayed, forsaken by His Bride) took the bread and broke it and said, "This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

He paints His Bride with His own body and blood, and impregnates His Bride with life when she comes to Him in surrender.

Clearly you *are* the Bride of Christ. And He *will not* let you go. But there is an Evil One, a Dragon, and I suspect he'll send emissaries who, after a sermon like this, will whisper in your ear something like this: "You're a whore, aren't you? You're just bad. Why don't you go watch some porn? Maybe you ought to go buy something."

Even more than that, maybe he will say something like this: "Maybe you had better give a lot more. In fact, maybe you had better give 20%." And then you say, "Jesus, would you be pleased with me if I gave 20%? 25%? How about if I gave you my raise this year? Would you be pleased with me then?"

Jesus says, "I *am* pleased with you! You came to my table! I washed you with my blood. You're my Bride. You can't buy my love."

So when you hear those voices, rebuke the Evil One and remind yourself who you are. You're the Bride of Christ.

Further Reading

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. . . .”

-Revelation 18:4-5

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” . . . Therefore its name was called Ba’bel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

-Genesis 11:1-4, 9

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . .”

-Luke 12:32-34

“And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations. . . .”

-Luke 16:9

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.

-I John 2:15-17

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

-I John 3:16-17

A survey of expenditures in the late 1980s and early 1990s demonstrated that Americans spent annually twice as much on cut flowers as on overseas Protestant ministries, twice as much on women's sheer hosiery, one and a half times as much on video games, one and a half times as much on pinball machines, slightly more on the lawn industry, about five times as much on pets, one and a half times as much on skin care, almost one and a half times as much on chewing gum, almost three times as much on swimming pools and accessories, approximately seven times as much on sweets, seventeen times as much on diets and diet-related products, twenty times as much on sports activities, approximately twenty-six times as much on soft drinks, and a staggering 140 times as much on legalized gambling activities (Ronsvalle & Ronsvalle 1992: 53-54). And in 1995 worldwide expenditures for advertising, designed largely to convince us that all of these and similar items are necessities, amounted to \$385 billion (R. Sider 1997: 21). As for church construction, between 1984 and

1989 American Christians spent \$15.7 billion (R. Snider 1997: 89). Suter (1989: 649) puts it pointedly: “In its most dramatic and obscene form, the question is whether the labour and resources of the Third World nations should contribute more to the opulence of America’s cats and dogs than to the elementary good health of Third World humans.”

Meanwhile, the amount of American giving to charitable organizations of all kinds remains relatively constant at somewhere between 1.6 and 2.16% of a family’s income (Stafford 1997: 21-22). American *Christians* do only slightly better, averaging somewhere around 2.4% of the national per capita income (R. Sider 1997: 205). And consistently, Americans with lower incomes give more of their earnings to religious organizations than those with higher incomes (Ronsvalle & Ronsvalle 1990: 154). . . . As for our governments, the US ranks last among the eighteen major Western donors of foreign aid in terms of percentage of GNP, while the UK comes in twelfth (R. Sider 1997: 31).

-Craig Blomberg, Denver Seminary

On Earth this desire is often called “love.” In Hell I feign that they recognise it as hunger. But there the hunger is more ravenous, and a fuller satisfaction is possible. There, I suggest, the stronger spirit—there are perhaps no bodies to impede the operation—can really and irrevocably suck the weaker into itself and permanently gorge its own being on the weaker’s outraged individuality. It is (I feign) for this that devils desire human souls and the souls of one another. It is for this that Satan desires all his own followers and all the sons of Eve and all the host of Heaven. His dream is of the day when all shall be inside him and all that says “I” can say it only through him. This, I surmise, is the bloated-spider parody, the only imitation he can understand, of that unfathomed bounty whereby God turns tools into servants and servants into sons, so that they may be at last reunited

to Him in perfect freedom of a love offered from the height of the utter individualities which he has liberated them to be.

-C. S. Lewis

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

-John 3:16

Throughout the entire Old Testament dispensation the wedding was announced. Next, the Son of God assumed our flesh and blood: the betrothal took place. The price—the dowry—was paid on Calvary. And now, after an interval which in the eyes of God is but a little while, the Bridegroom returns and “It has come, the wedding of the Lamb.”

-William Hendrikson

“And more than once I asked myself – as everyone asks – is God here? And I decided that He is closer to this place than any other place I’ve ever visited. The strange irony is that, amidst this absolute catastrophe of unspeakable proportions, there is a beauty in the way human beings are acting that defines the imagination. Everyone – underscore, everyone – is everyone else’s brother or sister. There are no strangers among the thousands at the work site. Everyone talks; everyone cooperates; everyone does the next thing that has to be done. No job is too small, too humble, or, on the other hand, too large. Tears ran freely, affection was exchanged openly, exhaustion was defied. We all stopped caring about ourselves. The words ‘it’s not about me’ were never more true.

“No church service; no church sanctuary; no religiously inspiring service has spoken so deeply into my

soul and witnessed to the presence of God as those hours last night at the crash site.

“In all my years of Christian ministry, I never felt more alive than I felt last night. The only other time I can remember a similar feeling was the week that Gail and I worked on a Habitat for Humanity project in Hungary. As much as I love preaching the Bible and all the other things that I have been privileged to do over the years, being on that street, giving cold water to workmen, praying and weeping with them, listening to their stories was the closest I have ever felt to God. Even though it sounds melodramatic, I kept finding myself saying, “This is the place where Jesus most wants to be.”

-Gordon McDonald’s journal entry (via Philip Yancey)
after volunteering at Ground Zero

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it

-Revelation 21:10, 24

The Prince Rides His War Horse

And You Feel Like a Little Ass Talking About Jesus

(Revelation 19)

REVELATION 19:1-8: *After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants." Once more they cried, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice crying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

Remember that the Revelation is being sent to the saints in those seven baby churches in Asia Minor. To them the Revelation must have seemed like a myth. The Word of God must have seemed like a myth.

Asia Minor is a long way from Palestine. Paul had planted the churches forty years before, but now Paul was dead and John was exiled. A few in these churches had been killed for not worshipping the Emperor. Many were facing economic trials (exiled from the trade guilds, persecuted yet also seduced back into their old lifestyles). These were probably the days of Emperor Vespasian or Emperor Domitian. So the coliseum in Rome was brand new. Soon it would be filled with the blood of Christians slaughtered by Roman gladiators for entertainment.

The world had never seen an empire—culture—economy—as glorious and powerful as Rome.

Now John writes this letter and sings a funeral dirge over Rome. He tells these churches they will *conquer* with Christ. It must have seemed like a *myth* . . . a lie . . . good words separated from their daily reality.

When you think about it, all good words seem separated from reality. I think we call that “futility” and sometimes “injustice.” The word “love,” for instance, shouldn’t feel like pain and suffering. Yet in this world it often does. The word “evil” shouldn’t look like a handsome man in a designer suit with gold rings. Yet in this world sometimes it does.

In fairy tales, the good somehow always turns out beautiful, and the evil is always exposed as a monster. Even in *Shrek* they turn out to be good-looking ogres. Something tells us the word “beloved” *should* look like a gorgeous bride, spotless and without blemish. The words “faithful” and “true” should look like a prince on a white horse. The words “coward” and “lie” should look like a snake.

The Hebrews didn’t really have a word for “word.” “Word” meant “thing”—“dabar.” So you “say a thing”; “hear a thing.” The Greek word for “word” was “logos”—idea—reality—meaning, and also “rhema”—applied meaning.

But this is what's so hard about words in this world: They don't always line up with the reality we experience. And so we say, "It's just words."

In the twentieth century, we came to believe that unless words matched what we could prove with our five senses, they weren't really true . . . just myths. That's called Logical Positivism, Empiricism, Scientism, or Modernism. The only problem is that Logical Positivism can't be proved true with Logical Positivism (our flesh, our senses), for truth is not of this world.

Well, what I'm saying is: Speaking good words in the world can be very hard. Words like "just," "faithful," and "true" tend to get crucified in this world. It's hard to speak the Word of God—Jesus, because . . .

1. The Word seems ridiculous and weak, and our world likes demonstrations of power.
2. The Word seems confused. How do you prove or define a word like "love" or "Jesus" (wrap Him up nice and tidy)?
3. The Word is painful. God's Word cuts against this world and into your own heart. And when it does, it lives in you with power and passion. But when you share it, it's often rejected as myth.

So many times when I'm done preaching or witnessing, I feel like a jackass . . . I feel like an *ass*: ridiculous, weak, confused, alone, rejected, by myself—my own flesh, my own five senses. I think, "How could I have *said* such things?!" *Crazy myths*. Haven't you walked out of church and said to yourself, "What was *that*?" I have.

Arguably the most influential theologian of the last century was Rudolph Buttmann. In 1941 in Germany, he published an historic essay on "Myth in the New

Testament,” in which he argued that scripture embodied a pre-scientific view of the world. He reasoned that to communicate the Gospel to the modern mind we needed to translate scripture into non-mythical terms. That is, we needed to “de-mythologize” the Word.

So while Hitler preached pagan myths, we (the Church) “de-mythologized” the Word.

In mainline churches, that fueled a liberalism that tended to make angels and demons into psychologies, and God into a great idea. So the Revelation was like a parable.

Fundamentalist churches reacted against that idea, but they did their own de-mythologizing, trying to prove the Word of God with science. They said they took the Revelation “literally,” which meant scientifically or empirically. They took numbers and calendars, space and time, very seriously. But the *meaning* was a *secondary* issue.

I think even Charismatics got in on de-mythologizing by teaching that God didn’t show up unless someone shook, fell down, or got up out of a wheelchair . . . unless there was *scientific evidence* . . . something you could see.

Mainline, Fundamentalist, Charismatic . . . I’m a bit of each. And for us in the twentieth century Church, words just didn’t cut it. To believe something, we needed to see it, explain it, chart it, or feel it. We needed *flesh*. Surely you don’t expect faith to “come by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”! In this world, “word” is ridiculous, weak, confusing, and even painful. So speaking the Word of God is *hard*. And what *is* it?

1. The Logos (Word of God) is unchanging truth. It’s scripture, *at least*.
2. The Rhema of God is more like God’s Word for a *moment*. How do I know *that* Word?

A friend tells about a prophetic meeting where a lady stood up and said in a dramatic voice, “Yeah, the Lord saith unto us He shall lead us in deliverance as Moses led the animals onto the ark.” She sat down and a few minutes later stood up and said, “Yeah, the Lord saith it was Noah.”

Cindy Jacobs tells about a meeting where a lady stood and said, “God says, Because you have disobeyed me I am going to write Michelob over this church.” I think she meant “Ichabod,” meaning “the glory has departed.” But at least they get free beer! (Maybe that could use some demythologizing.)

Some people think the spirit of *weird* is the Word of God. But not everything weird is holy, or we’d be worshipping Peewee Herman. Sometimes weird is just *weird*. And yet have you ever received a note or received a prayer or some words from somebody and it really *was* weird . . . not because it *didn’t* fit, but because it *fit so well*?

Even weirder, have you ever been the one who *spoke* the word? I have, on occasion, and what’s weirdest to me is it wasn’t those times I was trying *so hard* to hear God’s Word. In fact, I wasn’t even focused on me and what *I* could do. So I don’t fully know how it happened.

How are we to speak God’s true words in the moment?

REVELATION 19:9-10: *And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

Prophecy is speaking God's Word for the moment. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The spirit of prophecy is all about Jesus.

I'm a baby at all of this, but I've found that if I get all worked up about whether or not I can hear God's Word in the moment, whether or not I'm ridiculous, confused, or going to get hurt, whether or not *I* can hear . . . well, I *don't*. But if I can forget myself (my flesh) and get lost in Jesus, loving Jesus, glorifying Jesus, thinking about Jesus, worshipping Jesus, testifying to Jesus. . . It's at those times I've been shocked to find God's Word got through, and it *fit* like a hand in a glove.

The Prophetic Team is being overrun by people wanting prayer at the Living Stone Service. But if you come because you want to know who to date, what stock to buy, or how to feed your flesh, you don't get it. It's the testimony of Jesus. He leads—the Word leads—and we follow.

When I first prayed for some people who struggled with some powerful demonic spirits, for the first time I could see violent, physical reactions to words that came off my tongue. (That was because other spiritual realities momentarily controlled their flesh.)

Now I see that many of those words were prophetic, and I spoke them when I wasn't worried about *me*. I longed to see Jesus glorified. I would speak a thought, and the word was exactly like a knife sticking something in another world. And the wildest part was that it felt like the word had a life of its own. The word wasn't dependent on me. I was dependent on the Word—following the Word—which fit into a plan from before there was time. I just got the incredible privilege of speaking it into history.

The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. But the Revelation says the testimony of Jesus *is* the spirit of prophesy . . . a spirit . . . a living thing. And, you see, it's not just the few times I've been able to see it empirically in the

flesh, but every time I truly “testify” to Jesus I’m speaking a word that has a life of its own, “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword”—sharper and stronger, cutting into things deeper than flesh, even beyond space and time.

And every time I focus on Jesus, watch Jesus, love Jesus (not thinking of myself) . . . lost in Jesus, following Jesus and so testifying of Jesus . . . the Word actually rides out and conquers, even if I look like an *ass* . . . and later feel like an *ass* when I’m alone with myself.

REVELATION 19:11-16: *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.*

Remember, we preached that that winepress from chapter fourteen looks like the cross outside the walls of Jerusalem.

On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Remember that we just witnessed the destruction of the Great Whore (Old Jerusalem and all those whoring moneychangers in the temple). Now the Word rides in, and soon we'll see the Bride, the New Jerusalem.

Two thousand years ago, the Word rode an ass . . . into old Jerusalem. He died on a cross and cleansed His harlot Bride (His temple) with His blood that is wine.

John 12: On the cross, Jesus cast out the ruler of this world. He was *judgment*; His Word *is* judgment. There He draws all men to Himself. He does it through the Word proclaimed, and the Word is Himself.

Ephesians 5:25: Christ died for His Bride that He might cleanse her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present her to Himself spotless in splendor.

John 15:3: "You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you."

In this earthly realm, Jesus still rides into town on an ass. Like then, He often looks ridiculous, weak, confused, and in pain. In this earthly realm, Jesus still rides on jackasses. But in reality He rides the warhorse.

When you testify to Jesus (not yourself) and follow Him, you ride with the King, clothed in fine linen. You may look and feel like an ass, but there is no greater power and glory than the One who rides out on your tongue: King of kings and Lord of lords.

If you are a **mainline liberal**, you say, "Oh, that's a *myth*. It's not the real world!" Well, how do you know that the real world isn't a myth, and this mythical world is real?

Maybe Jesus *is* truth, and you are the lie. Maybe there really is a world where the Beloved is a “Glorious Bride”; where Word, faithful and true, is a “Conquering King on a white horse”; where they see evil for what it is — a snake; and good always conquers. And maybe truth is invading this world of lies. But He comes humbled and riding on an ass, because God wants us to chose His world in faith . . . the freedom of love, not the constraint of fear.

And one day all eyes will be opened, and the judgment is: “Did you choose to see me when I rode into town on an ass?”

Many **fundamentalists** say, “This is strictly in the *future* when all eyes will see.” Revelation 1:7: “Behold [that means “look!”], he is coming, and all eyes will see him.” He already *is* coming . . . it’s just that not all eyes can yet see.

Paul prayed for Ephesus and Asia Minor, for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of their hearts would be opened and they would know, among other things, the immeasurable greatness of His power at work in us who believe (Ephesians 2).

I think that prayer was answered forty years later when John sent a letter—a book—called the Revelation. Heaven is opened and, behold, He is coming.

People say, “Stop spiritualizing the text.” Maybe we need to stop “*flesh-atizing*” the text, as if “the spirit is nothing and the flesh availeth much.”

John 6:63: “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Stop taking this world, this space and time, *so seriously!* Now even science has shown us that this world is relative. Ask Einstein. All matter is fundamentally uncertain. Ask Heisenberg. This world is even incomprehensible to physicists without postulating other dimensions that intersect ours.

On the night of September 11, after our worship service, my friend Tom came up and said, “Oh Peter, as you were speaking, I kept seeing this white horse.” He told me later he saw Jesus on His horse, galloping up and down the front of the church. There were mounted troops lined up, and Jesus was agitated, excited, ready for war.

I think Tom saw the Word. I’m beginning to actually think Tom was seeing something more real than the room in which we sit.

Charismatics will say, “We didn’t see anybody shake, and no one got healed.” You realize that when Jesus, the Word, rode into Jerusalem and crushed the head of the Dragon, ransoming you from Hell (that is, cleansing His harlot Bride for all time, washing her with the blood of His eternal covenant), nobody shook with joy; nobody spoke in tongues; nobody’s back was healed. It looked irrelevant, weak, wretched, confused, and painful. And everyone abandoned Him, thinking He had failed.

He is the Word. He does not return void.

The twentieth century is over, and modernity turned out to be absurd. Maybe we need to “re-mythologize” the Word (as if we ever could have “de-mythologized” it). We need to “re-mythologize” ourselves. We need to believe the Word and not our flesh.

REVELATION 19:17-21: *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth . . .*

Remember that the kings of the earth have been consistently bad throughout the Revelation, serving the Beast and fornicating the Whore . . .

. . . with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest [the remnant] were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” wrote Paul.

So the Beast and the False Prophet will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. But the rest—the remnant—the kings of the earth—are slain by the Word (Logos) with the Word (Rhema), and the birds devour their flesh. Now check this out: In Revelation 21:24, the kings of the earth bring their glory into the New Jerusalem. They must have been slain in order that they might live.

“The Word because flesh [sinless flesh] and dwelt among us full of grace,” wrote John. Christ went to the cross to absorb *our* sinful flesh and die in our place. And there God condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

If we are crucified with Christ, we will be raised with Christ. Old flesh is stripped away, and we receive a new body. But the Word slays us—crucifies us. The testimony of Jesus is His death and resurrection, the Gospel. The Word

came to save sinners, and He slays us. So He reveals my sin, my flesh, my arrogance, my pride . . . crucified so I can live.

Speaking the Word can feel ridiculous, weak, confusing, and lonely, and it *hurts* because it cuts your own pride—your flesh, and it cuts those to whom you speak.

So you may feel like an ass, but in reality nothing is more glorious and nothing is more powerful.

Sometimes you can even see it in this world of lies. “For the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.” “He has taken His great power and begun to reign.”

At the end of the first century in Asia Minor, the Revelation must have seemed like a ridiculous myth. In 312 A.D., the emperor Constantine confessed Christ as “King of kings and Lord of lords.” By the end of the fourth century, most of the Roman Empire was at least nominally Christian.

According to historians and church tradition, in Asia Minor there lived a monk named Telemachus (a descendent of the seven churches). He spent his days in prayer, worship, and contemplation of Jesus, the Word. One day he felt as if he was to go to Rome (the old Harlot). He arrived at the time of the Roman circus when the city was celebrating their recent victory over the Goths. Confused and lonely, Telemachus followed the crowds to the Roman Coliseum (where the Harlot had drunk the blood of saints for 200 years).

The little monk didn’t know what to expect but thought God had sent him. He was shocked when gladiators marched into the arena carrying swords. They saluted the Emperor and cried, “We who are about to die salute thee.” Telemachus must have shuddered as he began to realize human lives were bought and sold and offered as entertainment.

He jumped to the top of the perimeter wall and cried out, “In the name of Christ, *stop!*” No one paid

attention. Telemachus followed Jesus, so he jumped down and ran on to the Coliseum floor. (This irrelevant, ridiculous, little monk.) He ran back and forth between gladiators yelling, “In the name of Christ, *stop!*”

A gladiator hit him with his shield. He went flying; the crowd roared with laughter. But Telemachus wouldn’t stop. He got in the way of a gladiator’s vision. The gladiator was angry; the crowd began to chant, “Run him through! Run him through!” The gladiator raised his sword, brought it down across the monk’s chest, and thrust it into Telemachus’ belly.

The story is that with his dying breath he spoke the Word: “In the name of Christ, stop!” With his flesh, Telemachus never saw the power and glory of that Word. Yet an amazing thing happened. The gladiators and the crowd all stared at the lifeless body lying in the red dirt. After a time, a man got up and left. Then another and another. All over the Coliseum they left.

According to historians, that was the last gladiator contest in the Roman Coliseum. It was won by the Last Gladiator. He set an ambush and rode out on the tongue of a ridiculous, little monk.

That was about 400 A.D. According to the U.S. Center for World Missions . . .

- By 1420 A.D. there was one Bible-believing Christian for every 99 people on the planet
- By 1790 A.D. there was one for every 49 people on the planet
- By 1940 it was one in 32
- By 1970 it was one in 19
- By 1980 it was one in 10
- By 1999 it was one in 8

He is coming. There is no greater power and no greater glory. Speak the Word. “Sticks and stones may break my bones,” but the kingdom of God comes with a Word—*the Word*. Sticks and stones will one day be dissolved by fire, but the Word of God abides forever.

The most powerful bomb we dropped on Afghanistan was two women—two witnesses—from Texas. If you’re going to bomb, be a bomb like that, a fool for Jesus.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Further Reading

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

-John 1:1-4, 9-14

“Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. . . . He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.”

-John 12:31-32, 48-50

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has

a name inscribed which no one knows but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

-Revelation 19:11-13

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

-Revelation 12:11

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

-Hebrews 4:12

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

-Ephesians 5:25-27

You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you.

-John 15:3

It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

-John 6:63

And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

-Revelation 19:21

This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass." . . . And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee." And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

-Matthew 21:4-5, 10-12

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants." . . . Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. . . . On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

-Revelation 19:1-2, 11, 16

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be,

God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

-Acts 2:14-21

“Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

-Revelation 19:10b

The essential thing is not what we say, but what God says to us and through us. All our words will be useless unless they come from within. Words which do not give the light of Christ increase the darkness.

-Mother Teresa

Behold, he **IS** coming with the clouds, and every eye **WILL** see him

-Revelation 1:7a

The Millennial Reign

The Princess Is No Victim

(Revelation 20:1-10)

America is at war. We're terrorized by terrorists, Anthrax, small pox, nuclear weapons. For the moment, Russia appears to be our friend. But China is a Super Power — They have the H-bomb, and they aren't far from Afghanistan. Kings of the east from the other side of the Euphrates (Revelation 9), symbolized by the Dragon (Revelation 12).

On October 1, 1949, Mao Tse Tung declared the birth of the People's Republic of China. All missionaries were kicked out; churches were closed and burned; pastors were executed. The Communist Beast began to rule.

In his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, in the chapter entitled "The Yellow Peril," Hal Lindsey writes that China has boasted of an army 200 million strong, the exact same number as that of Revelation 9:16.

In his book *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey reveals that the western nations will battle the oriental peoples (led by China) in the planet's last great war — Armageddon, which will usher in the millennial reign of Christ.

Wars, rumors of war, terrorism, plagues, immorality, abortion, drugs, promiscuity, divorce . . . On top of all that, the Church has lost its place in society, in the courts and the schools, belittled in the media. We've lost power, authority, and control. We've become victims in a hostile world. *Victims!*

And that's ironic, for God's plan was that we would rule the world from a paradise garden. For in the beginning God created man in His own image and said to them, "Be

fruitful and multiply . . . and have dominion [rule] over every living thing that moves on the face of the earth.” That would *certainly* include *snakes*. But you know what happened — *deception*.

The punishment was death, futility, and snake bites—dragon bites, bruised heels, and we were banished from the Garden.

Now this world is hardly a garden. The world is going to Hell in a hand basket. “The time is at hand,” we live in the last days, so we need to be prepared for His coming. Instead of a feast, maybe we need to stockpile food and head for the hills. It’s time to get *out* of here! It’s time for the Rapture!

In youth group, we used to hold Rapture Practice Drills. We would all jump as high as we could into the air. I’m being silly, but I earnestly believe that on the last day . . . “we will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord, and so we shall always be with Him” (I Thessalonians 4:17).

REVELATION 20:1-10: *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan [the Snake], and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.*

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not

received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived . . .

Some translations say “they came to life,” but the Greek is simple — aorist active indicative: “they lived.”

. . . and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations [the Gentiles] which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Revelation 20 is probably the most controversial chapter in all of scripture. So I have included a chart of four dominant millennial views from *Christian History* magazine. Remember that Millennium means 1,000 years.

In the upper left hand corner of the chart is the **Historic Premillennial** view. Several of the early church

fathers believed that after Christ returned bodily He would reign for 1,000 years on earth, and then the final judgment would come.

In the upper right corner is a view labeled **Amillennialism**. Several other early church fathers taught that this *present age* is the Millennium, and Christ reigns on earth *now* through His Church. As Christ taught in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of Satan both grow in history until the end when Jesus returns, and the earth is reaped on the last day.

About 410 A.D., Augustine wrote *The City of God* and argued for Amillennialism. In 431 A.D. at the third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus, the early Church denounced the Pre-millennial view as superstitious and unbiblical. The Amillennial view was the dominant and official church view for 1,400 years. It was the view of Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and as always, the Roman Catholic Church.

In the nineteenth century, **Postmillennialism** became the dominant view in America. It is the view that the 1,000-year reign of Christ happens in the future, but that it happens through the “ordinary means of grace.” Therefore, Christ’s bodily return is after the Millennium at the final judgment.

Postmillennialists believe a day will come when Christ, through the Church, will convert the nations and usher in a 1,000-year period of spiritual blessings and physical prosperity not yet experienced here on earth.

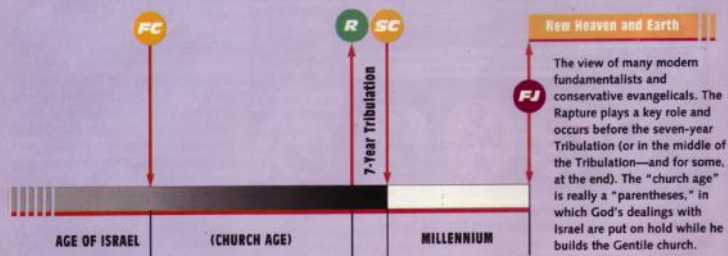
Postmillennialism gave rise to abolition, temperance, and the great missionary thrust of the nineteenth century. It was behind the Great Awakening and the second Great Awakening: the great American revivals. Both Charles Finney and the Puritan Jonathan Edwards were avid Postmillennialists. But over time, much of Postmillennialism devolved into optimistic liberalism, the belief in utopia by

Christian History Timelines:

HISTORIC PREMILLENNIALISM



DISPENSATIONALISM



LEGEND

MORAL PROGRESSION
Dark = Evil, Light = Good

FC FIRST COMING OF CHRIST

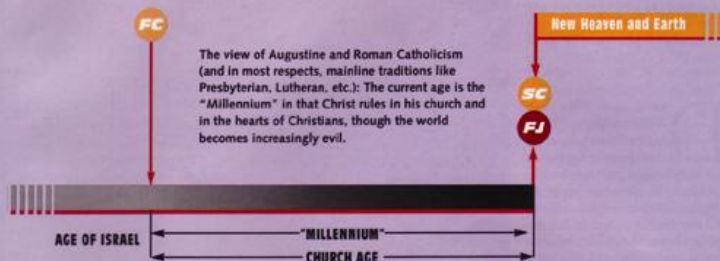
SC SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

R RAPTURE

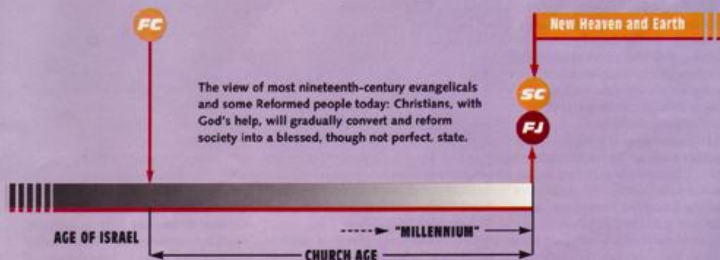
FJ FINAL JUDGMENT

The End.

AMILLENNIALISM



POSTMILLENNIALISM



End-time scenarios are not for the light-minded: terminology can be highly nuanced, and chronologies can easily confuse. These timelines attempt to clear up some of the confusion by illustrating the key differences of the four primary millennial views.

Though they don't illustrate the intricacies of each school

(even key terms are not identical: e.g., there is no "age of Israel" for dispensationalists but various covenants with Israel before Christ), they do illustrate each view's approach to key aspects of eschatology—especially the place of the Rapture, the timing and nature of the Millennium, and the moral and spiritual progression of history.

human energy.

Well, none of those views are the popular view in America today. Sometime in the mid-nineteenth century in England, John Darby developed Dispensational Theology and added an “extraordinary innovation” to his Premillennial scheme: the heretofore unheard of Pretribulation Rapture.

Dispensationalism teaches that Christians are mysteriously “raptured” prior to a seven-year Tribulation. They argue that the Tribulation has to do with the conversion of ethnic Jews and that this is what most of Revelation is about. After the Tribulation, Christ returns with His raptured Church. They set up an earthly government in Jerusalem and reign 1,000 years on earth, fulfilling Old Testament and Messianic prophecies. *After that*, the other dead from throughout history are raised and are judged. Then the end comes: new heaven and new earth.

Traditionally there has also been a fifth view known as the Igno-apothomillennial view. It means roughly, “I don’t know and I don’t care.” For most of my life, that has been my staunch position.

Well, we’re preaching through the Revelation, so now I *have* to care. I’ve been reading like a wild banshee-boy, and I can’t even begin to explain everything I’ve learned. But now I have a view, and I have real problems with the popular view. I want to tell you what the problems are, because our view of the end changes how we live *now*.

I want to tell you, but I don’t want you to be offended or feel attacked. We’re all learning, and I could be *wrong*.

Very simply, these are some of my problems with the popular view:

1. The popular view is part of Dispensationalism, a scheme which says that certain gifts of the Spirit, like prophecy, are no longer for today.

While I've been preaching through the Revelation, many of you have even had visions of things in the book. It's happening *now*. In Acts 2, Peter says these *are* the last days.

2. The popular view teaches that Israel and the Church are separate groups, that the Old Testament and most of Revelation is about the state of Israel, not about *me*.

But I *am* Israel, a child of Abraham by faith, one of the chosen people. Old branches were broken off, and I was grafted in. Scripture is extremely clear on that. Read Romans.

I hope that the old branches are grafted back in again, but the Church is not a parenthesis in God's plan for the worldly state of Israel. The Church is why the Lamb bleeds on the throne. She is why Christ died; she is His Bride, His temple, His body, His suffering presence in this world, redeeming the world.

3. The popular view doesn't take Scripture literally. They *say* they do, but I think they take it empirically, fleshly, scientifically, worldly.

"Taking it literally" means taking it according to its literal form, how the author intended it. It's painfully clear to me that the Revelation is not meant to be taken as a calendar. And the one thing the popular view takes as obvious is the one thing scripture says is *not* obvious. II Peter 3:8: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that

with the Lord a day is a thousand years and a thousand years is a day.” Who’s counting? God? Us? Are we traveling at the speed of light?

In our text, John writes of those who live — “kings and priests” who reign with Christ 1,000 years. Then John stops his description of the 1,000 years and says, “Hey, this is the first resurrection”—as if those folks in Ephesus and Colossae and Asia Minor ought to know what that is.

- In Ephesians, Paul says, “We’ve been raised with Christ and seated in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6).
- In Colossians, Paul writes, “If you’ve been raised with Christ, seek the things above” (Colossians 3:1).
- And if you’ve ever read the gospel of John or his letters, you know he is Mr. Born Again . . . always talking about eternal life and how we’ve “passed from death to life” (I John 3:14).
- In John 3, Jesus talks with Nicodemus and says, “Nicodemus, you must be born of the Spirit . . . you must be born again.” Nicodemus says, “You mean I have to enter again into my mother’s womb?” Jesus says, “Come on, Nicodemus. Just take a shot at abstract reasoning.” Actually Jesus says, “If I’ve told you earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I speak to you of heavenly things?”

In Revelation 20, John is now speaking of heavenly things, for Heaven has been opened. But we don’t believe it. We don’t *get* it. We don’t take it *seriously*. I think the modern Church is absolutely infected with “Nicodemitis”: spiritual blindness. So we pull out our calendars and start counting a

thousand years in space and time. John stops and says, “This is the first resurrection.”

Have you not been raised with Christ? Do you not have eternal life now? You’re His body, the living Christ is in you, and He’s not dead. “May the eyes of our hearts be opened . . .” (Ephesians 2:14).

The popular view doesn’t take Scripture seriously, and . . .

4. The popular view takes this world *way* too seriously . . . when this world will be dissolved by fire and faith will remain.

It takes space and time and empirical evidence way too seriously and spiritual realities not seriously. It “walks by sight and not by faith.” So the kingdom comes with “signs to be observed,” and we’re always asking, “When does the kingdom come?” — just like the Pharisees did in Luke 17. And Jesus says, “The kingdom does not come with signs to be observed. The kingdom is in the midst of you.”

And Jesus said, “In this world you will have tribulation [don’t take it so seriously!], but be of good cheer, for I have conquered the world . . . I rule the world.”

The popular view says, “Well, Jesus won’t let us suffer tribulation.” It’s not that He conquers and rules the world through us *in* tribulation, but that He takes us *out* of the world — Rapture Practice!

I believe the idea of a Pretribulation Rapture is unbiblical. It sends an awful message to the world . . . not that Christ suffers *for* the world, but that He hightails it *out* of the world. We are the body of Christ. We “fill up the measure of His sufferings,” writes Paul . . . that must be in the world. He overcomes the world *in* us *in* tribulation. “Be

of good cheer!”

I have Romanian friends who bear the scars of torture on their bodies. One friend held his dying wife in his arms, because she would not renounce her faith. Mozambican friends were persecuted and imprisoned for their faith, and I’m supposed to say, “Be of good cheer because God will rapture His faithful Church *before* the Tribulation”?

Americans taught that doctrine to the Church in China in the 1940’s. When the Communists took over and started torturing the Church, many Chinese Christians thought they had missed the Rapture. According to Brother Andrew, many missionaries were not allowed back by the Church, for those Chinese Christians said, “You told us that before tribulation we’d be raptured. You’re liars.”

The cross is tribulation, and we’re crucified with Christ.

5. The popular view makes the cross small. It discounts what God has already done and is doing.

“*Now* is this world judged, *now* is the ruler of this world cast out, and I, when I am lifted up (said Jesus speaking of his death), I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:31).

On the cross, Jesus bore our judgment, conquered the enemy, and conquered the world. And we are “more than conquerors through him who loves us” (Romans 8:37).

On the cross, Jesus “disarmed the principalities and powers” (Colossians 2:15). He told us, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

In Luke 10, He said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread

on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you.” — No more snake bites.

“If God is for us who would be against us” (Romans 8:31)? “For all things are yours . . . and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s” (I Corinthians 3:21). Revelation 1:5-6: “By loving us and washing us in his blood [that is, his cross], He [Jesus] has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Gosh! If you really believed the cross and took scripture *literally* and didn’t take this world so *seriously*, I think you’d almost figure the Millennium is *now*.

Technically, I suppose that puts me in the Amillennial camp. But “Amillennial” means “no Millennium,” and I believe in the Millennium. I believe the Millennial reign of Christ happens whenever we walk by faith. Whenever we walk by faith the kingdom of God is upon us. And eternity (“*kairos*”) invades each moment (“*chronos*”).

Of course, I believe all chronology will end. Jesus will return with fire . . . *as* fire consuming the earth and His adversaries. And there will be judgment at the last day (John 12). And He will raise us up on the last day (John 6). And it will be the *last day*, not 365,000 days *before* the last day.

Until then, I am to “occupy” . . . “occupy until He comes” (Luke 19). I’m to reign and rule.

I know what you’re thinking . . . “If I were king for a day, things would be different!” Well, you’re not to be king for a day but for eternity, and being a king is far more difficult than you think. Ask Abraham or Joseph or Moses or Saul or David. (Their stories are all about you.) Or ask King Jesus . . . Being a good king can hurt.

And we are child kings now. Child kings reign with a reagent. We reign with Christ. But we really do reign and

rule. Rule over what?

1. We are to reign over **sin** in our own flesh (Romans 6:12). The world is enslaved to sin. We rule it through grace. We're forgiven . . . no longer condemned. That means . . .
2. We rule over the Accuser, **Satan**. Satan is *bound* by the Gospel Word on your tongue. He is bound in Hell. Yet I suspect Hell is among us just as Heaven is among us. Satan's only hope is to get you to believe lies, live in lies, and believe Hell. He is unbound at the end to mislead the nations. (I imagine that's outright Satanism . . . when he no longer needs the Beast and False Prophet.) But he is still bound by the Word that rides on your tongue.
3. Sin . . . Satan . . . We even rule over **creation**. "All things work for the good with them that love him." Yeah, it can *hurt* a lot! But for you tribulation has been transformed from wrath into grace. In trials, God shapes you into the image of Christ the King. In trials, you exhibit the Gospel of Christ. In trials, Christ Himself communes with you in suffering. Every moment you receive in gratitude by faith becomes an eternal moment. Christ is with you, and you commune with Him—walk with Him. You walk with God, like in the Garden. Your prayers rise before the throne as He speaks creation into existence. You rule the world by faith. Don't let it rule you.
4. We rule over sin, over Satan, over creation, and even over the **hearts** of men and women. We are priests; that is, we bring them to God. We are the body of Christ in this world, and when *His* body is broken and when *His* blood is shed . . . when *His* body (us) is crucified, when we suffer in love, He draws all men to Himself through us.

“Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (II Corinthians 2:14).

I may be wrong about the Millennium, but I am right about this: “You are a chosen race, a royal [“basileous” - kingly] priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” *Why?* “That you might declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).

So I may be wrong about the Millennium, but the resurrected Jesus did appear to His victimized, seemingly powerless disciples and did say, “All authority [rule, reign] in heaven and on earth has been given unto me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations [They’re no longer bound by Satan] . . . and lo I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

You are kings and priests . . . that you would live and reign and declare the Word—the Rider on the white horse.

Satan’s only hope is to convince you it’s not true . . . so you’ll get all depressed, fearful, and anxious; so you’ll close your heart and mouth, keeping the Rider inside; so you’ll stockpile food and hoard the feast and wring your hands as you wait for the Rapture and dream of the Millennium.

Satan’s only hope is to convince you you’re a *victim* when you’re really a victor. His only hope is to convince you the world rules you when, in fact, you rule the world.

In 1949, when Mao took over China, American Christians wrung their hands, and many thought, “That’s it. The Church is powerless in China.” It’s a good thing Chinese Christians didn’t believe that. It’s estimated that there were 750,000 Chinese Christians in 1949. China is now the second largest evangelical Christian community in the world with a conservative estimate of 35 million believers. I’ve read numbers as high as 100 million believers, which

would make it the largest Christian community.

In the U.S., the Church is stagnant. In China, Africa, and South America, it grows at an unprecedented rate. While Lindsey wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth* and we wrung our hands over the “Yellow Peril,” Pastor George Chen was shoveling human sewage in a Chinese prison camp. They thought putting him deep in the cesspool was the best punishment for a pastor.

But George Chen loved it there because he was left alone with Jesus, the King of kings. When he was released from prison after eighteen years, he found his churches had grown from 300 to 5,000 people. He had reigned in the cesspool.

That’s *crazy*! Yes . . . just about as crazy as the King born in a barn and placed in a manger . . . or the King stripped naked and nailed to a cross. Even there, *especially there*, He conquers. Look who sits on the throne bleeding.

Years ago my friend Ed got to hear a pastor named Y. Chan share his testimony. I don’t know if Y. Chan is the same man as G. Chen, but Chan was sentenced to labor deep in the prison camps cesspool as well. He said, “I enjoyed it there in the cesspool because I could pray as loud as I wanted, I could recite scripture and no one would come near me, I could sing hymns with all my energy. One of my favorite hymns was ‘In the Garden’”:

I come to the garden alone, while the dew is
still on the roses, and the voice I hear falling
on my ear the Son of God discloses. And He
walks with me and He talks with me, and He
tells me I am His own. And the joy we share
as we tarry there, no other has ever known!

Chan said, “When I sang this hymn in the cesspool, I understood the meaning of the garden. I met my Lord in

the garden of the cesspool.”

Instead of death, futility, and snake bites, he lived, reigned, and stomped on the old Dragon. Just think of it! On earth (in the cesspool) he exercised dominion as he walked with God in the garden. Amen.

If you have a cesspool, which I suppose we all do, just think of it now. Maybe it's a painful situation . . . maybe it's some sins that seem to have a hold on you . . . maybe it's fears, anxieties, insecurities, shame, and guilt — *human waste*.

From that place, repeat these words quietly: “Lord Jesus, come to my cesspool and be with me.”

If you really ask Him, He does come. I imagine He was already there. Now pay attention to Him. I believe this is what He tells you: “I’ve got this place beat! So don’t let it lie to you. You walk with me. Let’s go conquer the world.”

In Jesus’ name, believe the Word of God and walk by faith not by sight. Amen.

Further Reading

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can this be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

-John 3:6-12

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. . . . And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

-Revelation 19:11a, 20:4-6

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come

into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

-John 5:24

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

-Colossians 3:1-4

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all. And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature

children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

-Ephesians 1:15-2:7

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

-Matthew 28:18-20

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.

-II Peter 3:8-10

The Dragon Is a Legalist

Dying by the Law and Living by Grace

(Revelation 20:11-15)

[Peter enters stage carrying on his back a large backpack full of books.]

Man, these books are really heavy . . . but I have to carry them with me because I want to know what's good . . . because I want to *be* good. These are the Books of Judgment.

They are extremely complicated, so I've simplified and reproduced one page onto an overhead transparency so you can see. (I showed you something like this four years ago, but you need to see it again.)

This [Exhibit A] is *one* page from *one* book for *one* moment of *one* day in the fall of 1975:

The Book of Judgment, Peter Hiatt

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I have edited the page to include only three people: Bobby, Dave, and me. (There were others on the page like Alan Parsons and Susan Coleman, but Alan goes to church here, and I married Susan, so I think it's politically expedient that I delete their records.)

This is how it works:

On the left is The Table of Good Deeds. (Of course, in 1975 I referred to it as Categories of Cool.) On the right is The Record of Good Deeds, measured in "UGU's" (Universal Goodness Units).

In 1975, if you had Ski Tags on your jacket, that was *really good*. Even in September Bobby, for instance, had ski tags on his jacket, so give him 2 points; I had ski tags on my jacket, so give me a 2; Dave didn't have any (0).

Sports was really big. Bobby was really good at sports (3 points); I was on the soccer team but wasn't that good (2 points); Dave didn't do any sports (0 points).

Girls — all the girls loved Bobby (3), and a cheerleader *talked* to me (3)! Dave — no girls (0).

Pimples — Bobby didn't have any pimples (3); I *did* have some pimples (1). Dave — one day he came to school with dried Clearasil on his face (-1).

Dumb Instruments — Bobby didn't play any dumb instruments (3); I didn't play any dumb instruments (3); Dave was the state champion cello player (-3).

Body Function Noises — Bobby didn't really have any good body function noises (1); however, I could make noises with my throat (3); David could burp the *entire alphabet* (5).

So you would tabulate up the scores, and these scores were constantly factored into historical scores. But for the sake of understanding, we'll plot the scores for this particular day, assuming we all started at zero.

1. Calculate and plot.
2. Draw the Universal Geek Line. Those above it are The Good (The Cool); those below it are The Bad (The Geeks).

In 1975, I was ruled by The Book of Judgment. It determined who I would sit with at lunch and to whom I would say, "Hey, Dude" in the hallway. It was the reason I went out for sports I hated; it was the reason why I quit piano. I was driven in fear by The Book of Judgment —

enslaved. It determined my moods.

If, for example, Bobby got a big zit, I rejoiced. (I was *that much closer* to my idol.) When I was down, I could think of Dave carrying his cello across the football field while I practiced soccer. (I could judge him “last and least” and feel good about myself.)

But in 1975, I got cut from the soccer team. I don’t know if I have ever been so depressed . . . not because I missed soccer, but because it knocked me down into the Geek Zone.

I went behind our house beside the railroad tracks, and I wept for hours thinking, “How am I going to explain to my children and my grandchildren that I was a *geek*?”

That really hurt, but after a few weeks of mourning, I just changed a few categories on The Table of Good Deeds, thus lowering the Universal Geek Line. That’s the beauty of it . . . but also why it’s so much *work*: all the computations! It’s why you kind of live in fear . . . “What if *my* computations are inaccurate? I bet *Dave’s* Book of Judgment is different from *mine*. What if I am *Bobby’s* geek — the ‘last and the least’ who makes him feel good about how cool he is?”

Well, if you’re in tenth grade and you’re feeling embarrassed, let me show you a page out of The Book of Judgment from the Standard American Adult Male [Exhibit B]. It’s exactly the same layout . . . same Operating System . . . but the categories of good have changed:

Business Success

Wife

Kids

Landscaping

Snow Blower Horse Power

The Universal Geek Line is now called the Invite Them Over For Dinner Line. Above the line are the Responsible Citizens; below the line are the Less Fortunate. You plot for friends, neighbors, Taliban . . . it's important to have someone like Osama bin Laden considered on your page (he doesn't have a snow blower; his landscaping stinks) – the “last and the least” to help make you feel good about yourself.

Here is a page out of The Book of Judgment for a Standard Taliban Soldier [Exhibit C], except the categories of good are things like this:

- Beard Length
- Beard Bushiness
- Dominance of Sassy Women
- Fighting in Jihad
- Dying for Allah

The Geek Line is now the Jihad Line; above the line are the Muslims; below are the Infidels.

Now, this is a Standard Jewish Pharisee page from *their* Book of Judgment [Exhibit D]. The Table of Good Deeds has been changed:

- Circumcision Party
- Phylactery Length
- Not eating with Tax Collectors & Sinners
- Not being born in a barn
- Not being crucified on a cross

The Geek Line is now the Holiness Line, with Righteous above and Sinners below. The Operating System

is competition, envy, judgment, fear.

Some of you are saying, “It’s a good thing we’re Christians instead of Jews or Muslims.” Well, *this* is a page from the Standard American Christian Book of Judgment [Exhibit E]. It has the same Operating System (competition, envy, judgment, fear); it has the same layout. But The Table of Good Deeds has been changed:

No Gross Sins

No Cussing

Neat-o Christian Words (like “bless you” and
“propitiation”)

Quality Bible Cover

Short-Term Mission Project

Harry Potter (whether or not you’ve seen the movie)

The Geek Line is now the Saved Line. Born Again Christians are above the line. Now, we’re not supposed to judge, so the area below the line is the I Wonder If They Know The Lord zone.

Now, you’re probably thinking, “That is *so true* of Christians. I’m glad I’m not a legalistic Christian.” Well, this is a page from the Standard American Non-Legalistic Christian Book of Judgment [Exhibit F] . . . same layout . . . just The Table of Good Deeds has been changed:

Understanding your freedom in Christ

Not being judgmental

Graciousness

Number of Philip Yancey books read

Niceness to the “last and least”

But the Operating System is just the same: competition, envy, judgment, fear. So we are enslaved to trying to “be free in Christ.” We judge people on how judgmental *they* are. We’re driven to be most gracious. We *use* niceness to the “last and the least” in order to earn points.

Here’s a page from *my* Book of Judgment today [Exhibit G]. The layout is much the same, but The Table of Good Deeds is now . . .

Preaching well
Church size
Family
Evangelism

The Geek Line is the God Is Pleased Line. Above it is Good Pastor; below is Bad Pastor. The neighbors who I judge myself by are people like pastor friends, Andrew Trawick, Tim Brewer, Dave Jones.

This is an amazing thing, but Jesus was in Dave Jones. He turned out to be one of my best friends; he was the best man in my wedding. We worked in ministry together, but I still battled the Book of Judgments. So when Dave preached at Youth Group (and he was good), I would secretly hope his message didn’t go well . . . because then I’d look better.

My friend Tim had a larger church than I did. But in a depression he asphyxiated himself, leaving behind a wife, children, and a confused church. Something inside me wanted to say, “Yeah! . . . I won!”

I remember the night I held Dave Jones in my arms as he sobbed, “Leslie [his wife] is leaving me.” Something in me wanted to rejoice.

I’ll be honest . . . When Andrew Trawick comes back

from those mission trips to places like Mozambique where thousands come to Christ, it will get me depressed. Why? Because in that same time, *I* didn't lead anyone to Christ. So

Peter Hiatt

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The BOOK of JUDGMENT

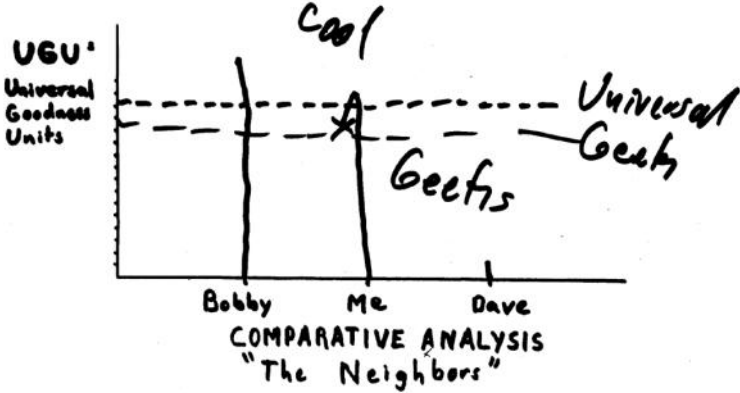
The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS
"categories of
cool"

Ski Tags
~~Sports~~
Girls
Pimples
Dumb Instruments
Body Function Noises

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS (in UGU's)

Bobby	Me	Dave
2	2	1
2	2	1
3	3	1
3	3	1
3	3	1
1	3	5
15	18	22

The COMPUTATION of "THE GOOD" + "THE BAD"



what's my wish? That thousands of people *didn't* get saved? I might as well just wish 'em all to Hell! . . . to guard my ego.

Do you see what I end up doing? — Hating my best

Standard American Adult Male

Page # 8.625 X 10³⁶

The BOOK of JUDGMENT

The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS

Business Success

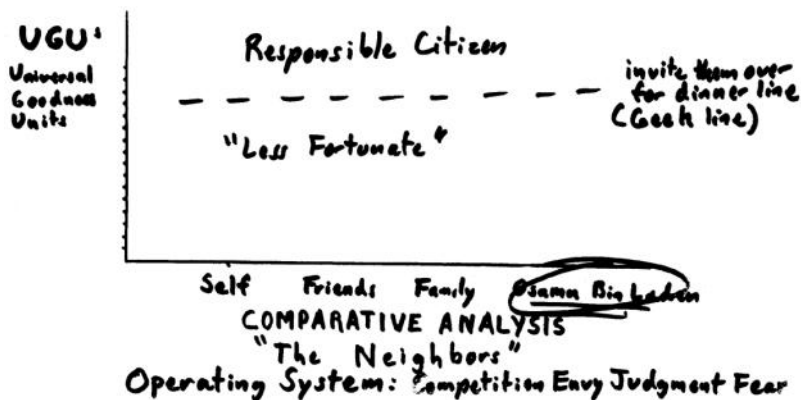
Wife

Kids

Landscaping

Snowblower H.P.

The COMPUTATION of "THE GOOD" + "THE BAD"



friends, hating the kingdom, maybe even hating God. And then when I see this, I hate myself . . . condemn myself.

I think scripture calls all these books The Law. And

Standard Taliban Soldier

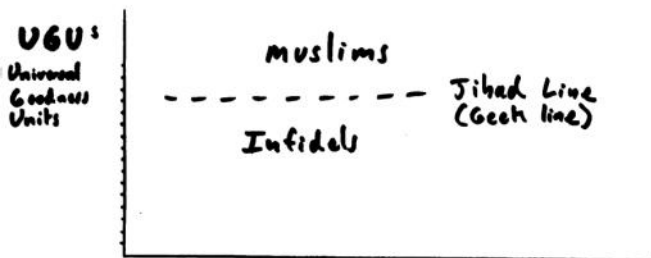
The BOOK of JUDGMENT

The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS

Beard Length
Beard Bushiness
Dominance of Sassy Women
Fighting in Jihad
Dyeing for Allah

The COMPUTATION of "THE GOOD" + "THE BAD"



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
"The Neighbors"

Operating System: Competition Envy Judgment Fear

the energy by which I play this game is called The Flesh.
When I live by the Book of Judgments, I walk in death. I
can't live gracefully. With all these books on my back, I can't

Standard Jewish Pharisee

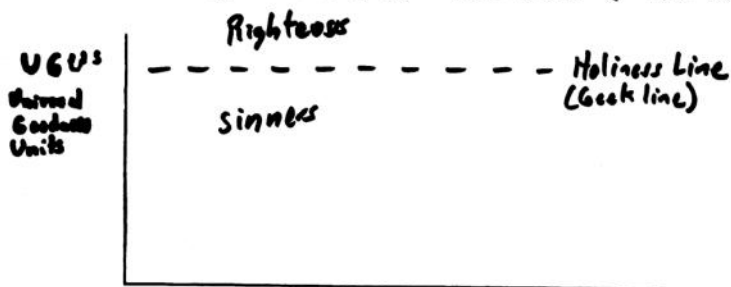
The BOOK of JUDGMENT

The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS

Circumcision Party
Phylactery length
Not eating with Tax Collectors + Sinners
Not being born in a barn
Not being crucified on a cross

The COMPUTATION of "THE GOOD" + "THE BAD"



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
"The Neighbors"

Operating System : Competition Envy Judgment Fear

dance well, sing well, laugh well, live well. Ironically, trying to be good I *can't* be good. I'm always preoccupied with the books and how I measure up. Calculating, scheming,

Standard American Christian

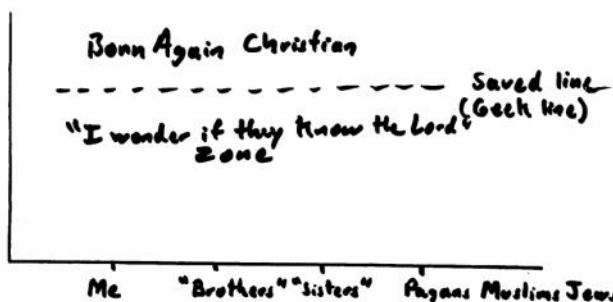
The BOOK of JUDGMENT

The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS

No Gross Sins
No Cussing
Neat's" Xtion words
Quality Bible Cover
Short Term Mission Project
Harry Potter

The COMPUTATION of "THE GOOD" + "THE BAD"



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

"The Neighbors"

Operating System: Competition Envy Judgment Fear

posturing, posing . . . It's a terrible burden to carry. And I can't lose myself; I'm enslaved to myself.

Jesus said, "Unless you lose your life you'll never

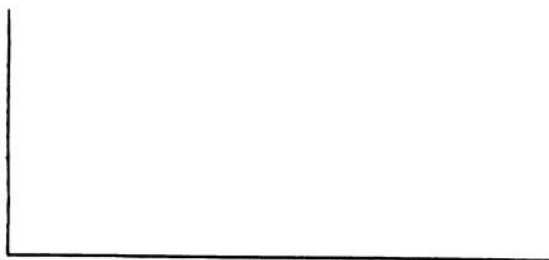
Standard American Non-legalistic Christian
The BOOK of JUDGMENT

The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS

Freedom in Christ
Not being Judgmental
Graciousness
of Philip Yancey books read
niceness to "last + least"

The COMPUTATION of "THE GOOD" & "THE BAD"



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
"The Neighbors"

Operating System: Competition Envy Judgment Fear

find it." I'm unable to get beyond myself, so I certainly can't love others, I can't love God, and I hate myself.

I John 3:14: "He who does not love abides in

Peter Hiatt New

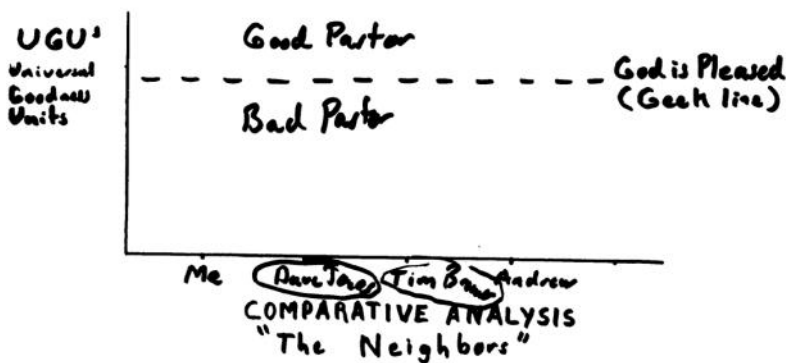
The BOOK of JUDGMENT

The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS

Preaching Well
Church Size
Family
Evangelism

The COMPUTATION of "THE GOOD" + "THE BAD"



Operating System: Competition Envy Judgment Fear
Pride Self-centeredness Sin - DEATH

death.” *Death*. The walking dead.

In Genesis 2:16, God said, “Adam [man], you may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the

GOD

The BOOK of JUDGMENT

The TABLE of
GOOD DEEDS

LOVE

the Lord with all
you are +
your Neighbor
as Yourself

The RECORD of
GOOD DEEDS

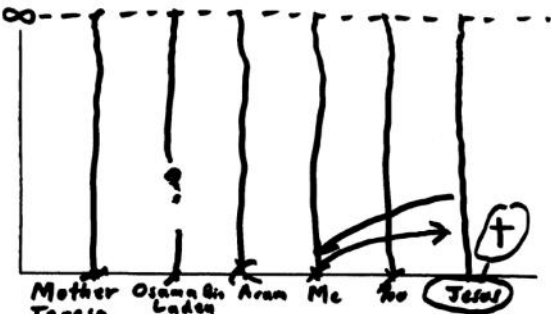
Children of Adam

Dead

Jesus
and Adam

Perfect

The COMPUTATION of “THE GOOD” + “THE BAD”



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
“The Neighbors”

Grace

knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” At the Dragon’s tempting, Adam doubted God’s goodness, trusting the law instead of God. He ate and he got the law library and lost God. He ate and got knowledge of good and evil . . . the knowledge he was naked, bad, and dead. The walking dead.

REVELATION 20:11-12: *And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead . . .*

Remember in the last paragraph John saw the “living,” those who “live with Christ on earth,” the first resurrection . . .

. . . the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

The dead are judged by the things in the books, according to their deeds. Jesus said, “Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged.” That is, “If you want to play by the book, you’ll *get* the book.”

Have you ever wondered why it is that across the globe people have a knowledge of good and evil? We argue about the details, but people live with these books in their hearts and minds, constantly keeping score, trying to be good.

It’s because we all know deep inside that we have a

Creator, He *is* good, and He *has* books. We exist in fear of those books, constantly preparing our defense, for we know that one day the books will be opened and there will be an accounting.

Jesus revealed on what that accounting is based. He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. On this rests all the law and prophets."

By loving your neighbor you love God.

In Matthew 25, Jesus said this:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. . . .

He will say to those at his left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food . . . thirsty and you gave me no drink . . . a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did

it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. . . .”

If you want to live by the book, God *is* keeping score. He’s in Lazarus by the gate; He’s in the “last and the least.” They sit on thrones judging nations. He’s in them in judgment. You may even do many mighty works in His name . . . feed the “last and the least,” but He may still say, “Depart, I never knew you” (Matthew 7).

The goats say, “When did we see you?” Well, they *didn’t* see Him . . . *ever!* They just saw the “last and the least” and a way to score points. (Just by judging someone “the last and the least,” I judge Jesus Christ “last and least.” Remember that when He walked this earth almost everyone judged Him “last and least” . . . a baby in a food trough . . . a peasant on a cross—cursed.)

So living by the book, God is everywhere in my world as *judgment*. And just by playing the game, trusting the books, I hate my neighbor, so I hate God, and then I hate myself. And I broadcast to the heavenlies, “Yes, I stole the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” *Guilty*.

Well, if we dare guess at God’s Book of Judgment, I imagine it would be something like this [Exhibit H]:

- The Table of Good Deeds would be summed up as: LOVE . . . the Lord with all you are, and your neighbor as yourself.
- The Record of Good Deeds: Children of Adam — Dead.
- When I compute The Good and The Bad, what is it God requires? — Perfection. How are we doing? Well, Osama bin Laden is dead. Mother

Teresa, apart from God, is also dead. Aram, you, me . . . dead, in our trespasses and sins.

So what good are the books or the knowledge of the books? — They tell us we need a Savior. They tell Adam [mankind]: A walk with God is better than a law library.

“And now, Adam, you will meet the pinnacle of good. Jesus means ‘God saves.’ You’ll see the Savior.”

Well, in Revelation 20 on the last day, books are opened (Tables of the Good and Records of Good Deeds), and another book is opened: one book—the Book of Life. In chapters thirteen and seventeen of the Revelation, we read that this book contains names written from the foundation of the world, before Adam fell. *Names* . . . it doesn’t say *deeds* but *names*.

To the Hebrews, names were persons. These are persons who have entrusted themselves to the Lamb on the throne. It’s the *Lamb’s Book* of Life. Jesus said in the book of John, “Truly, truly, he who hears my word [Remember that the Word rode out at the beginning of this chapter] and believes him who sent me has eternal life [already alive!]. He does not come into judgment [condemnation] but has passed from death to life.”

How can that *be?! Paul* tells us. “For our sake God made Jesus to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (II Corinthians 5:21). Jesus is called the Second Adam. His righteousness is imputed to us by faith as a *gift* from God.

[Exhibit H]: To me as a gift, to you as a gift, to Aram as a gift, to Mother Teresa as a gift, to Osama bin Laden . . . I *hope so*, for God desires that none should perish.

The Operating System is *grace*, and He *is* The Good — not a *what*, but a *who*.

Paul wrote, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written,

‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”

I suspect that tree, the cross on which Jesus was crucified, was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Jesus was crucified, cursed by the law on our behalf. Colossians 2: “And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

At the cross, God opens His books. For the children of God, judgment was the cross of Christ. Jesus said, “*Now* is this world judged.” At the cross, God opens your books (with their legal demands), and with His own blood through all your history—past, present, future—He stamps “CANCELLED” on every debt.

Greed—CANCELLED

Lust—CANCELLED

Fornication—CANCELLED

Adultery—CANCELLED

Murder—CANCELLED

Abortion—CANCELLED

Judging Dave Jones at the football field—
CANCELLED

CANCELLED, CANCELLED, CANCELLED . .
.“By my blood” . . . “Drink of it, all of you.” [Peter is looking through books on the communion table and stamping them.]

Paul goes on in the same verse and writes, “There [on the cross] he disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in Jesus.”

Do you see what Paul is saying? This is not just Be Happy Psychology. This is the very heart of your battle with the Ancient Dragon. You conquer him by “the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony,” applying the blood of the Lamb to every moment of your life. You must believe you are *entirely* forgiven and *thoroughly* loved. Then every point of sin is transformed into a point of grace.

Instead of Jesus waiting in judgment, He’s waiting to show you His *grace*. And every sin is transformed from shame into a demonstration of love, for every sin was on that cross and now reminds you of Easter and tells you how much God loves you and how good He truly is. And every moment you step on the head of the Old Serpent, for He has no ground on which to accuse.

Satan has been disarmed. Yet he is the Accuser and the Father of Lies, so although my certificate of debt has been cancelled, Satan made Xeroxed copies (like Juan Carlos Ortiz said). His only hope against me is making me believe falsified documents, making me doubt the grace of God and the blood of Christ—that I’m totally forgiven and thoroughly loved. For then I live by the old books . . . I begin to condemn myself and walk in death, doing the work of the Accuser *for* him. That’s how he takes me out of the battle and keeps me from doing the “works of God.”

They asked Jesus, “What must we be doing to be doing the works of God?” And Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom he sent.”

REVELATION 20:13-15: *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s*

name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Theologians argue about whether the saints (the sheep) are even *in* this scene. If we *are*, we're not being condemned for sinful deeds. However, in Revelation 22:12, Jesus says, "I am coming soon with my reward to repay everyone for his deeds."

Well, if my evil deeds were judged and paid for at the cross, what deeds are *these*? If my record of condemnation is cancelled, what record is *this*? If I'm not paid for evil deeds, what deeds *am* I paid for?

Matthew 25:

The King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?"

I don't think they saw Jesus *there* because they saw Him *everywhere*. And He wasn't waiting in the "last and least"

to condemn them, He was everywhere in grace and waiting in all His brethren to be loved and to love . . . and to reward them with all His kingdom.

And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me.”

And I bet they don’t even remember . . . because they *weren’t keeping score*. They weren’t conscious of the Books; they weren’t conscious of themselves; they weren’t conscious of the “last or least”; they were conscious of Christ.

So they loved because they had been loved by Christ. In short, they weren’t trying to be good; they just *were* good.

I work so hard at trying to be good to impress God and impress you. On Judgment Day, trumpets will sound, and Jesus will say something like this:

“Peter Hiett, on August 7, 1987, at 5:15 PM, you gave me a cup of cold water. Enter the kingdom.”

And I’ll say, “But what about the sermons? I don’t even *remember* giving you cold water.”

“Exactly. You weren’t trying to be good. You *just were*. And now you know good and evil, not because you are evil and dead, but because you’re forgiven and alive and I’ve made you good. You actually love.”

So what am I saying? **Try harder to love?** No. Confess that you don’t . . . and receive His love. It’s called *grace*. Jesus taught, “The one forgiven much loves much.”

Richard Wurmbrand said that several years ago in the province of Besarabia, Romania, the Soviet army marched into a particular village. They rounded up all the Christians, some two hundred of them, and took them into

a field and forced them to dig their own graves. They were to be shot.

When they were finished the captain said, “Whoever renounces Christ can go home immediately.” Some decided to be shot. Some renounced their faith. While they were returning to the village and the executions were about to begin, a man came running from the village to the field screaming. All the villagers knew who he was. The man had been expelled from the church for “gross sins.” He had seen his sin. He came running from the village shouting, “Shoot me too! Shoot me too! I’m a bad Christian, but a *bad* Christian is *also* a Christian. A bad Christian *also* has the right to die for Christ. Shoot me too!”

He wanted to die for Jesus. “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend.” Jesus was his “friend.”

Jesus must have turned to the angels and said, “Oh, there is my new creation made with my blood!” He wasn’t a bad Christian; he was a *new creation*.

Forgiven much, we love much. Open your eyes. If you call Jesus your Savior, you’ve been forgiven much.

Exhibit A

Exhibit B

Exhibit C

Exhibit D

Exhibit E

Exhibit F

Exhibit G

Exhibit H

Further Reading

But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. . . . Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

-Revelation 20:5-6 (NKJV), 11-15 (NAS)

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and

those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.”

-John 5:22-29

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work [ergon].”

-Revelation 22:12

Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work [ergon] of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

-John 6:28-29

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works [ergon], lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works [ergon], which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

-Ephesians 2:4-10

For as many as are of the works [ergon] of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")

-Galatians 3:10-13

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

-Colossians 2:13-15

"He who **overcomes** shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

-Revelation 3:5

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

-Revelation 17:8

For whatever is born of God **overcomes** the world. And

this is the victory that has **overcome** the world--our faith. Who is he who **overcomes** the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? -I John 5:4-5

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.

-I Corinthians 4:3-5

It is a consoling idea, that before God we are always in the wrong.

-Soren Kierkegaard

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.

-Romans 8:1-2

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

-I Corinthians 13:4-5 (NIV)

God is love

-I John 4:16 (RSV)

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

-I Corinthians 13:7 (RSV)

The Bride Goes Home

And Everything Old Is New

(Revelation 21:1-14)

It's only eight days until Christmas — until we get *new stuff*. As a child, I could barely wait, because if I got what I wanted, my life would be complete and I would be happy ever after. Do you remember that thrill on Christmas morning? I remember my electric race car set — *paradise*. Tony Campolo describes the Christmas morning he got his train set:

I was overcome with joy. A sense of ecstasy surged through me. I loved everything. I loved everybody. The world became radiant and wonderful. A sense of aliveness permeated my consciousness. . . . I stayed in my state of heightened awareness and sensitivity for almost three hours. Then something happened to the trains. They didn't break. (Broken trains can be fixed.) Something far worse than that happened to them. They became old.

I remember that my racecar set was such paradise and ecstasy, but by about 7:00 p.m., after watching cars go round and round, it had gotten old.

Material possessions get *old*. So we should be less materialistic and appreciate the wonder and beauty of God's creation—sky and land, heaven and earth, the wonder of life . . . less toys and get the kids into nature.

A few months ago Susan and I came home from a date. We walked into the house and all the lights were on.

The hamster cage lay broken and open on the floor. No hamster . . . but hamster bedding and refuse was spilled on the new carpet. It looked like a bomb had gone off. We heard Poppy (Grandpa, my dad) upstairs reading stories to the children.

He would explain to us later that the neighbor girl brought *her* turtle over to see *our* turtle and then decided to bring *her* hamster to visit *our* hamsters. In fact, the children had already done this and learned about the wonder of reproduction. So our neighbor's hamster had new babies, which technically are my kids' grandbabies, and Poppy told them they shouldn't hold the babies, but they did.

About that time, my son's gecko escaped from its cage and couldn't be found. My son was distraught . . . I imagine the dog was barking . . . and then the mother hamster got so nervous she began to kill her babies and do uncivilized cannibalistic hamster things.

The kids were so horrified to see this, that our daughter's friend went into a hysterical rage and threw her hamster off the top deck. Somehow our hamsters got out, everyone was screaming and yelling, Poppy was on his oxygen and couldn't move so fast . . . He told them to calm down, and my son yelled, "You don't understand our pain!" One child fell on the floor screaming in uncontrollable agony; there was open wailing and general pandemonium. All Hell broke loose. My father said it was such chaos that he decided to sit down and read a book.

Finally, when the chaos had died down, my two youngest came to Poppy and said, "We need some Bible stories. Would you say our prayers?"

If you idolize nature, spend some time on a farm or in a stable . . . or get some hamsters . . . and nature can get old really quickly.

Toys get old, this world gets old . . . in every new experience we hope for fulfillment and ecstasy. We may

even *taste* it for a moment, but then it gets old.

- *Church* gets old. New people will sometimes say, “Oh, I’m so glad we found this church. The worship, the preaching, the programs . . . !” And I wonder, “Will they leave when it gets old?”
- *Religion* gets old. At the time of the Revelation, Judaism was thousands of years old and had become cynical and dead, *so* dead that Jerusalem had murdered the Messiah.
- *People* get old. How many times have you met someone and thought, “This person has it all together.” Then they get old.

C. S. Lewis writes:

These things are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. [They get old.] For they are not the thing itself, they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited.

So I got a new race track for Christmas . . . and it got old. I got a turtle, snake, dog . . . and they got old. I went camping . . . and it got old. I got a new church . . . and it got old. I made new friends . . . and they got old. I married a bride . . . and now I’m going to change the subject. What is it that makes a thing old?

1. On a physical level, it’s when a thing decays and

breaks down — entropy.

2. On a personal level, things get old when they get old *to us*, when we think we have them figured out, when there's no mystery left . . . no wonder, no newness. People's physical bodies get old, and when we think we have them figured out they get old to us. For some, God is old news and not wonderful, because they think they have God figured out. The higher the percentage of things you have figured out in your world, the older you are, and the older is your world, and the closer it is to dead. A toddler has nothing figured out, and everything is wonderful.
3. Decay and a loss of wonder makes things old. In short, anything in time ("chronos") gets old.

Well, now . . . we all want the new and wonderful, but the older we get the more we know that *new* gets *old*. So we get cynical. We all want the new, but we're all fearful of the new, because to get the new is to lose the old (that was new). So we say:

- "Give me that old time religion! It's good enough for me."
- "Careful of that *new* stuff."
- "Play it safe."
- "Stay at home."

Somewhere in life, we switch strategies: We give up on the new and hang on to the old. Instead of wanting a new house, we want a home. Instead of wishing for new experiences, we guard the old. But just as the new becomes old, we can't stop the old from being replaced by the new. We *cannot* stop time.

Some people leave church because it gets old. Some people leave church because it gets new. They'll say all kinds of things, but the bottom line is, "Church just doesn't feel like home. Remember how it *used* to be?" They may try to find another church, but like they say: "You can never go home."

Sometimes I drive by the house where I grew up in Littleton, and I think, "You can never go home. Dad will never work in that yard again while I play in my fort, while Lydia and Rachel play with the rabbit, and while mom makes fried mushroom sandwiches in our kitchen with the mustard yellow countertops and the avocado refrigerator. I'll never go home."

And then I want to grab my dad and hang on, because he's eighty-two with heart trouble and a lung disease. But, you can't go home.

The folks in the seven churches in Asia Minor were probably mostly the Diaspora (dispersed Jews). Jerusalem was their *real* home. Jerusalem was Abraham, David, Solomon, Exodus, the exile . . . It was the twelve tribes and also the twelve apostles (Peter, James, John); it was the temple: the place they met God, and John had memories of meeting Jesus there; it was history, energy, religion for 2000 years, and in 70 A.D., the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem. They literally plowed the temple into the ground. All that energy gone, laid waste . . . all that labor in vain. They must have thought, "You can never go home."

I remember when my bride came down the aisle. I was afraid, afraid that the new would get old, and I was afraid the old was being replaced by the new; that is, I wasn't going home. In fear, hanging on to the past and worried about the future, I almost *missed* the bride coming down (the aisle). I remember thinking to myself, "Stop it! Stop worrying! Live this moment. Don't miss this moment. Live NOW!"

The “now” is what is actually new. And if I don’t live in the now (which is new), it will never be the old. I won’t have the new *or* the old, and I will have never lived. And I will have missed the bride coming down, because I was preoccupied with fear. And at the end of our marriage she will say, “Depart! I never knew you. You never made our house a home.”

NOW is when I can know another.

NOW is when I live.

NOW is when I make choices.

NOW is when I create.

NOW is when the new is created into the form of the old.

NOW is when I enjoy a gift or make a home or see a bride.

NOW is the moment eternity touches time.

Scientists say that if I traveled at the speed of light, all time would be eternally present; all past and all future would be eternally new; all old would then be forever new . . . at the speed of light.

And God said:

“Let there be light.”

“Moses, my name is I AM.”

“*Now* is the acceptable time; *now* is the day of salvation.”

“Jesus” means “God saves,” and Jesus said, “I came that you might have life and have it abundantly.” Eternal life, new life, a life of newness.

Remember that at His cross, Jesus redeems every page of our book, every moment of our lives. At His cross, “He makes all things new.” When we’re with Him in each moment, we live new.

Well, I just got real mystical and biblical. So I’ll summarize: In this world of time (“chronos”), every new thing gets old, every old thing is replaced by the new – it dies in time.

Last week I had a burrito with my dad. He’s getting pretty old, and I worry that one day he may die. He’s getting old, but I remember one moment, looking into his eyes. He was so *excited* and *animated* and *grateful* about something, and, well, he just seemed so . . . *new*. Maybe he’s not totally living in time.

My bride just turned forty-one. But to me she’s more new and wonderful than ever. She’s still coming down that aisle.

REVELATION 21:1-2: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband . . .*

John sees “a new heaven and a new earth.” John sees a “new world”; it violates our three-dimensional laws of physics. That’s not because it’s *less* real but *more* real than this world. Jesus’ resurrected body wasn’t *less* real but *more* real than brick walls.

“A new heaven and a new earth” . . . and I have a theory that it is disproportionately populated with goldfish

and hamsters (set free from their bondage to decay, having obtained the glorious liberty of the children of God through little pet-loving children saying their prayers before bed.)

It's back to the Garden, but not just the Garden. John sees a city. (Cities are made with human hands, but this city comes from God.) Maybe it's built like a "good work which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in it." It is adorned with the "righteous deeds of the saints" (Revelation 19:8).

At the end of the chapter, "the kings of the earth bring their glory into it," stuff like computers and microwave ovens and electric trains, I suppose. So I fully expect to see my electric racecar set in heaven, and it will never get old, and it will never get old to me.

John sees a city, but not just *any* city, he sees Jerusalem . . . the New Jerusalem. I guess you *can* go home.

I asked my dad, "Are you scared to die?" He said, "Oh no. In fact, I had a dream . . . I think it was a dream of Heaven. The old farmhouse . . . Mom and Dad and my brothers and sisters . . . we were all having such fun. I dreamt of home."

Maybe you can go home, but it's never old . . . it's always new.

REVELATION 21:2-8: *And I saw the . . . new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men."*

"God with us." If you say that in Hebrew, it is pronounced "Emmanuel." That's what they called the baby in the manger in the stable.

“He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”

And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But as for the cowardly [fearful], the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators [fornication is sex outside of marriage], sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”

But He said He makes all things new. That must mean “all kinds of things new” or “all new, He makes new” or that some things are made new after the second death or that those people and the Dragon and the Beast aren’t really “things” but vessels of wrath and shadows of things. I don’t know, but He makes all things new . . . old but forever new.

REVELATION 21:9-14: *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven*

last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

In Revelation 3:11, Jesus says, "He who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God." This Jerusalem is that temple (it appears), and it is built with people. Names are inscribed on the gates and on the foundations . . . names like Judah, who sold his brother Joseph into slavery and fornicated his daughter-in-law Tamar . . . names like Peter, who lied about Jesus and ran like a coward . . . names like John, who wanted to murder an entire Samaritan village, who is also seeing this vision.

The city is built with liars, fornicators, and murderers who have been redeemed. It's built with John, who must have wondered at times as he was exiled on Patmos, Is all my work and struggle and ministry just in vain? Was Jerusalem all in vain?

All the people, all the faith, all the hope, all the love that went into building that old Jerusalem was not in vain.

In time, they built a Jerusalem of stone, which the Romans destroyed. But with their faith, hope, and love God built the heavenly Jerusalem in eternity. Faith, hope, and

love abide . . . that labor is not in vain.

We think faith, hope, and love are tools they use for building the city. Maybe building the city was the tool God used for building faith, hope, and love . . . the eternal city. Well . . . He makes all things new, so nothing you give Him is wasted.

Some of you are discouraged; some of you are tired; some of you are confused; some of you feel wretched because of sin. Surrender it . . . give each moment to Jesus in the obedience of faith, and that moment becomes gold brick in the eternal city. It fits perfectly, for it was prepared before time by God.

History is like a backwards explosion. Do you remember in school when the teacher would play a movie backwards—reverse time? We would watch an explosion or a wreck backwards. All the burnt, confused, old pieces would miraculously fly together, from the end to the beginning, and make something new that was old.

Jesus is end and beginning. He can play the Big Bang forwards and backwards. I think the biggest bang is not the *beginning* but the *end* of time, when it all comes together in wonder through His cross. He is playing the biggest bang backwards.

The night the hamster bomb went off at my house and all Hell broke loose and then my children repented, read Bible stories, and prayed — all the pieces will come together in the new creation . . . hamsters everywhere and a city built with the faith, hope, and love of children.

Well, the New Jerusalem is built with people. II Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.” My dad’s body is old, but his spirit is new. My bride’s body is . . . great (but getting old). Her spirit is a new creation. She is a mystery and wonder far greater than the day I met her.

The new creation is already here in God's people. Church will get old or new . . . unless you realize church is God's people, and then the old is forever new.

"We no longer view anyone from a human point of view," writes Paul. "Once we saw Christ from a human point of view; we see Him that way no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

The new creation has already invaded the old creation. It was born into an old, dirty stable and lain in a manger. In that manger, in human flesh, was the bottomless depths of the Father, our Lord God. Mysteries unimaginable and wonders that will never cease.

In Revelation 3, Jesus says, "The New Jerusalem is coming down." It is coming down, but do you have eyes to see? Most people walked past the stable that Christmas. But some shepherds entered in through that stable door, they wondered, and they lived.

Hebrews 12: "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking." When we hear the Word in faith, New Jerusalem comes down. In faith, hope, and love the New Jerusalem builds us.

Paul said, "The Jerusalem above is our mother." Eternity gives birth to our temporality. "Anyone in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come." (For those people, their world must be wonderful!)

My dad came over while I was writing this sermon. All he does any more is talk about how *wonderful* everything is. He said, "Peter, gosh, that church is *wonderful*, and those people are *wonderful*. Oh, Peter, I love this house, and your kids are so *wonderful*. Even your wife . . . she's *wonderful*." Then he said this, and I quote: "I love C-470. I love going up and down that highway. I *love* those foothills. They are just *wonderful*." And I started laughing.

Sometimes I think my dad is kooky. But he's not. I think he's starting to see the New Jerusalem through that stable door. Maybe he's getting so new that everything is new to him.

You know, whenever we receive a moment in faith (thank you, Jesus!) instead of fear, we live in that moment. That moment is *now* and eternal and new, and that's where "I AM" is—"God with us"—and "He makes all things new."

Maybe whenever we believe the *new* covenant and so sing the *new* song with a *new* heart and *new* spirit and *new* life, walking in *newness* of life . . . maybe we begin walking into the New Jerusalem *now* . . . or at least see it by faith through the stable door.

Whatever the case, one day a trumpet will sound, and there will be no doubt. You'll see it . . . with a new body and new eyes. And you'll say, "This is *it*! I'm *home*! Hey, look! It's C-470 made of gold! . . . and Dan Hiatt, but he's built like Arnold Schwarzenegger!"

Everything old is forever new, and you recognize it, for you have visited this country in faith, hope, and love.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the world of Narnia comes to an end at an old stable, but it's a magic stable, for once you're in it everything is new. Lucy remarks, "In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world."

Well, some look in the stable door and see nothing but refuse. But for those who love Aslan (the Great Lion), they see a whole new world.

At the end, Aslan comes to the stable door and roars, "Time!" and the giant named Time wakes and enters the stable. The stars fall; Narnia ends. Those who could see enter the open stable door. And those who would *not* see walk into the eternal night. Inside the children find themselves in a new outside, a new world. Lucy and Peter

mourn the old world, and Digory says:

“Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan’s real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream.”

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right forehoof on the ground and neighed, and then cried: “I have come home at last! This is real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, come further in!”

They go further up and further in, and it gets better and better, “more real and more beautiful,” “world within world, Narnia within Narnia,” unceasing wonder. They find their parents from England, and then Aslan appears and says:

“Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story . . . which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Listen to the One who is speaking: “Behold, I make all things new.” Believe the Word and live.

Further Reading

“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended.”

-Isaiah 51:6

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

-Romans 8:19-21

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

-II Peter 3:11-13

In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

-Hebrews 8:13

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

-II Corinthians 5:16-17

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

-Ephesians 1:9-10

"It seems, then," said Tirian, smiling himself, "that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places." "Yes," said the Lord Digory. "Its inside is bigger than its outside." "Yes," said Queen Lucy. "In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world" . . .

He [Aslan] went to the Door and they all followed him. He raised his head and roared, "Now it is time!" then louder, "Time!"; then so loud that it could have shaken the stars, "TIME." The Door flew open. . . .

"The Eagle is right," said the Lord Digory. "Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream" . . .

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right forehoof on the ground and neighed, and then cried: "I have come home at last! This is real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, come further in" . . .

"I see," she [Lucy] said at last, thoughtfully. "I see now. This garden is like the stable. It is far bigger inside than it was outside. . . . This is still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below, just as *it* was more real and more beautiful than the Narnia outside the stable door! I see . . . world within world, Narnia within Narnia. . . ." "Yes, said Mr. Tumnus, "like an onion: except that as you continue to go in and in, each circle is larger than the last" . . .

Then Aslan turned to them and said: "You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be." Lucy said, "We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often." "No fear of that," said Aslan. "Have you not guessed?" Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them. "There *was* a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes

on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

-C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*

What the caterpillar calls the end, God calls a butterfly.

-James Hewitt

“Behold, I am making all things new.”

-Revelation 21:5

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel. See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.

-Hebrews 12:22-25a

Feeling Sexy

Crushing the Serpent's Head

(Revelation 21:9-22:5)

Pastor Walter Wangerin writes:

The woman sitting before me has a . . . problem so difficult to state that she twists her fingers in silence. She has come alone and looks . . . lonely.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I just don't know how to say it."

"Take your time," I say.

She smiles a small apologetic smile. "He," she says—she's referring to her absent husband. The problem is in their marriage. "Whenever we, ah, make love," she says, dropping her eyes . . .

As though she has just made up her mind, she says the sentence smoothly: "Whenever we make love, he laughs." She looks up. Her eyes question me.

"At you?" I ask. "He laughs at you?"

"No. Oh, no." Now she is concerned that I don't misunderstand. "No, he laughs for joy."

This is what she thinks the problem is . . . her husband's pleasure at entering her . . . He laughs like a boy at a new joke; the tears run down his cheeks and he kisses her.

"Does the noise distract you?" I ask.

“I don’t think so,” says the woman. We’re talking about her feelings now, so she drops her eyes again and twists her fingers. “I,” she whispers, blushing: “I sort of giggle with him. He’s having so much—” Her poor face blazes with embarrassment; her voice falls to a distant whisper, “—so much *fun*, you know. But that isn’t right, is it? Isn’t he being, I don’t know, disrespectful, like laughing in church? And then, when I laugh too, I feel so—guilty.”

She feels shame.

In Genesis 2, God makes man, and then He makes His bride from the man’s bleeding, wounded side. Verse twenty-four: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

In Ephesians 5, Paul writes, “This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying it refers to Christ and his church.”

Genesis 2:25: “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made.” The serpent (the Ancient Dragon) tempts Eve. Eve takes the fruit and gives some to Adam.

“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

Psalm 16: “In the presence of the Lord there is

fullness of joy. At his right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

They heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden . . . “and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And Adam said, ‘I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”

A pastor went to visit one of his parishioners. He rang the doorbell, waited, and no one came. Finally, he took out his card, wrote Revelation 3:20 on the back, and slipped it under the door: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”

Two days later the pastor received his calling card back in an envelope with a brief note attached — Genesis 3:10: “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

We’ve been studying the Revelation. We read Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock . . .”

Why *don’t* we open the door? Why *don’t* we invite Him in? — not just with our heads but our hearts? Why *don’t* we thoroughly surrender in absolute and joyful obedience? Why *don’t* we invite Him into every dark corner of our souls so every breath we take is the ecstasy of unadulterated, passionate surrender? *Why?* — Because of shame. And we’ve had reason for shame.

We’re all like our mother Eve, who trusted the Snake and became a harlot. So we hide from God, but we’re desperate for communion and fulfillment. So we join ourselves to idols: cars, houses, jobs, pornography, adultery; but that makes us only *more* ashamed. Then the presence of the Lord is shame and drives us deeper into the trees, deeper

into the dark, deeper into the closet. His glory becomes our criticism; it's the story of Israel.

Through the law, God reveals: "Israel, you're being a whore." Through the prophets, God cries: "Israel, you've become a harlot!" But it only drives Israel deeper into the dark, into the closet, and she *will not* open the door and let Him in. She has too much pride to surrender her shame.

A child wrote in a school paper, "The Jews were proud people, and throughout history they had trouble with the unsympathetic genitals." I think he meant "Gentiles," but I hope he got an "A" . . . because he was right.

In Acts 2, the problem with the Jews was an uncircumcised heart, the unsympathetic genital of the soul; a heart unfeeling, sealed off to God, hiding in the dark, hiding in the bushes.

The law was criticism driving them deeper into shame.

Husband, you know that if you really want to make love to your wife, the last thing you want to say when she puts on the lingerie is, "Hey, you put on a few pounds this week." That may be true, and it may be best if she hadn't, and you may love her thoroughly and absolutely, but *that* (criticism) will slam the door, my friend. And she may have sex with you out of obedience, but not joyful surrender. Her heart will be far from you.

Jesus said, "This people [Israel] honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." He was quoting Isaiah, who goes on to say, "Therefore, I will again do marvelous things with this people."

Ezekiel prophesies to God's whoring Bride: "Yet I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. I will confound you when I forgive all you have done."

Hosea 2:14: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, romance her, entice her, and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her, and there I will give her her

vineyards; there I will make the Valley of Achor [Valley of Trouble] a door of hope.” That is, “I’ll take my whoring Bride through trouble, and there in that wilderness I’ll provide a door. I will show my grace and romance her heart out of the darkness.”

Israel of God, Lookout Mountain Community Church, we were *born* into the wilderness. And Christ is the door.

- In Revelation 17, one of the seven bowl angels takes John to the wilderness. There he sees the Great Whore, and he hears God call, “Come out of her, my people!”
- In Revelation 19, the Word of God—Christ Jesus—conquers.
- In Revelation 21, one of the seven bowl angels takes John to the mountain and shows him the Bride of Christ coming down from God.

Jesus takes His whoring Bride and washes her with His blood—His Word. Jesus has entered the shadows—entered the closet—and He whispers:

Eve, Eve . . . I went to the tree. I was crucified on the tree. You handed me the evil fruit (for I am always with you), and I was not deceived, but I took the curse for the love of you.

I am the last Adam, and I am your Lord. I died for you. So see my face . . . your scars on my brow; your bruises on my back. Now see the glory of God shining in my face. Yes, my Eve, you’ve sinned immeasurably. But I have already loved you immeasurably more.

Ephesians 5:

Even so husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

He whispers:

Eve, Eve . . . come out of the darkness. I bear your curse, and now look in *my* mirror . . . not the old law but my perfect law—the law of liberty—my grace . . . and see yourself clothed in my righteousness. And now, Eve, it's our wedding day. Say "I do" with all your heart, so you would laugh with joy as I enter you and give you life for evermore. Look in *my* mirror and believe.

Revelation 21:9 is the last vision in the Revelation, the last vision in scripture. This tells us what God is doing . . . *why* the wilderness, *why* the Valley of Achor, *why* the curse, *why* the pain, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls of wrath. You'll never understand the Gospel until you understand what it is God wants. "Eve, look in the mirror and see who you are."

REVELATION 21:9-22:5: *Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in*

the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

That means John looked and saw his name! This was a mirror.

And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal. He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as

glass.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day--and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

“Eve, look in my mirror and see who you are.”

This is so hard to preach, because it's *all here* . . . “the hopes and fears of all the years.” Little children, there is no night here, and there is no curse here. We're back to the Garden.

But Eve is not just in the Garden, the Garden is in

Eve. The Garden and the city are the Bride of Christ. And she is radiant (every precious stone; supernatural gold; pearls for gates). She fulfills the prophecies of Ezekiel, Hosea, and Isaiah; the words of Jesus—Living Water—Light of the World. She is twelve tribes and twelve apostles (Israel and the Church). She is a cube, just like the sanctuary in the temple, but 1500 miles wide, 1500 miles deep, and 1500 miles high. A *big gal* . . . she contains the throne of God; she is His temple and He is hers. She sees His face, and she has His glory.

“Eve, look in the mirror and believe who you are.”

Now, this is the future, for the first earth had passed away. Yet John writes, “By its light shall the nations walk.” *What* nations?

In verse fourteen, he writes, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates [those pearls]. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood.” That sounds like *now*.

We already *are* the temple of God, according to Paul. We *are* the Bride of Christ. Jesus said, “He who believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” He said if we believe, we have eternal life *now*. And Jesus said, “We *are* the light of the world.” Jesus taught He was a pearl merchant who paid everything for the greatest pearl—His Church.

A pearl is God’s miracle, which gets wrapped around a wound in an oyster buried in the mud. The Church is God’s people wrapped around the *wound* of Jesus, buried in this fallen world.

The gates are pearls. The gates are the Church *now*. And according to Paul, we’ve seen the “light of the

knowledge of the glory of God in our hearts already . . . the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Hebrews 12:22 says, “You’ve come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” In the first century, John wrote, “The New Jerusalem *is* coming down.” Somehow it’s already here. Eternity is *now* by faith.

Jesus is not the Ghost of Christmas Future. He is the Alpha and Omega. So this is not what *could* be; this is what *is* . . . *now* . . . what is in eternity.

“Eve, look in the mirror and see who you truly are.”

The problem is that we don’t have eyes to see. In Ephesians 1, Paul prays for the seven churches in Asia Minor: “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know . . . what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints . . .”

You are Christ’s glorious inheritance . . . *now*. (I used to read that verse and feel sorry for Jesus. “God, what a depressing gift!) Maybe we don’t know what glory or beauty really is . . .

Remember in the fairy tale *Shrek*, the princess Fiona is under a curse, and she turns into an ogre at night. But she falls in love with the ogre Shrek, who saved her from the dragon. She begins to think Shrek is beautiful, although the world thinks he’s ugly. When Shrek kisses her, the curse is broken, and she is forever gorgeous: that is, she is an ogre during the day as well as during the night. And what we thought was ugly is the greatest beauty to Shrek.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, there is one beholder: the Lord God.

The world thought Jesus on His cross was an ogre, but He is the romance of God. Nothing is more glorious, and we reflect His glory. But unlike the movie, with Christ

the curse on all creation is broken. So all will see we've been blinded by the god of this age . . . and nothing is more beautiful than Christ and His Bride.

Nothing is more beautiful in all creation than redeemed people, because redeemed people reflect the glory of God through grace.

The great city is a harlot redeemed, a bride in love. But remember, it almost didn't happen in the fairy tale, for Fiona thought the *beautiful* was *ugly*. She thought *she* was ugly. So she hid herself every night in shame.

Maybe we don't know what real beauty is . . . so we listen to the criticisms of the world . . . displaying our pride, vanity, and dead works, but hiding our faith, hope, and love for Jesus, who saves us—our testimony of His grace.

Well, Jesus says, "Eve, please look in *my* face. Look in *my* mirror—*my* Word—and see what I have made you: my Bride. Believe and come out of the shadows and into the light."

People of God, do you have any idea how gorgeous you are to Him? How beautiful you are in eternity? How valuable you are right now? He cannot love you more than He already has and does. He desires you like the most passionate groom longs for his bride on his wedding night.

But He will not storm the closet and rape you. He will not rip you from the bushes and tear off your garments. He wants you to *want* Him. He wants you to give yourself to Him as a gift. He wants you to stop hiding in shame. What is it He wants? He wants a loving Bride.

A groom's worst nightmare on his wedding night is that the bride will come out all wrapped in flannel, hiding herself in shame. He wants the bride to dance into the room saying, "Oh, Baby! I'm hot! I'm sexy! And I'm all for you! Take me now . . . I'm God's gift to you!"

What is a bride's worst nightmare? That she'll dance into the room and the groom will say, "Yuk." Jesus will not

say that to His naked Bride.

To confess your sins is to be naked before Him.

If you've confessed yourself to Him, He has washed you with His blood. Believe the Gospel: You are the gift of God *for God*. You are the gift of the Father given to the Son: the Bride. You are the gift of the Son given to the Father: His children.

Believing your value is not arrogant. Calling yourself a “piece of crap” is arrogant. How dare you curse yourself, condemn yourself, hate yourself, abuse yourself, demean yourself, when God calls you “Bride”! He did not suffer hell for a piece of *crap*.

Believing your value is not arrogant, for the value doesn't come from you. The New Jerusalem is the creation of *God*. Your righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. Believing your value is believing the cross of Christ and the sanctifying work of His Spirit. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.” It's already complete in eternity; complete in the *now* of faith.

Did you notice it was one of the seven bowl angels who showed John the Harlot and the Bride? The seven angels reminded us of the seven-fold Spirit: the Holy Spirit—the Spirit in each church, working sanctification.

Whatever the case, the Church conquers by the blood of the Lamb. He gives us His blood; He makes us His body. When we curse ourselves, we curse Christ.

Look at His side. Where did He get His scars? — They're *your* curses. Why would He do it? — To romance you out of hiding, so you'd look and believe He has made you gorgeous, spotless, and without blemish. He finds you thoroughly sexy in the best possible sense of the word. So He whispers, “Come out. Let me see your face. Let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is gorgeous.”

It's the end of the story . . . and what did God want? Obedient robots? Knowledgeable scholars? Soldiers to accomplish His mission? No. *A Bride*.

My bride has no mission statement. She has no purpose. I mean, I did not marry her for some *other goal*. She herself is the treasure; my mission, purpose, and goal.

You are God's treasure *now*, as you are. Believe who you are already, eternally, and then you will give yourself joyfully in the freedom of love. When you do that, every mission will be accomplished, and every purpose will be fulfilled in time. For the Lord enters His temple, and a river of life will flow, and the Bride will begin to produce fruit. When you do that, the King takes up residence, and you shine. The "light of the world"; "a city set on a hill." The world sees the pearl of great price and longs to enter.

Satan's only hope is to make you hide the glory under a bushel. [Singing:] "Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm gonna let it shine."

This little light of mine is the King of Glory on His throne.

When you do that, when you surrender your heart, you conquer. John writes, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith."

Stop hating yourself! Believe the Gospel. Look in the mirror every day and say, "God is *nuts* about you. Jesus died for the love of you. He gives nations for you. You are created for His glory. You are priceless." When you pray, confess everything to Him and then bask in His love.

It is the greatest gift . . . yet I have such a hard time doing it, and now I know why: It is the heart of my warfare against the Ancient Dragon. There is a Snake trying desperately to scare me back into hiding, saying, "Stop preaching, stop smiling, stop living. Get self-conscious." He has no weapons except lies and my own shame, but he is

subtle, and I have believed his lies.

As I've preached through the Revelation, my wife Susan and I have spent a lot of time praying for a friend. I mean this in all sincerity: She is one of the most (if not *the* most) beautiful believers I've ever met. She has a hard time seeing it, but I don't, and you wouldn't either.

Her father was a Satanist. (He worshipped the Dragon.) She was raised in a coven. Her story is so painful I don't think I would believe it except that in praying for her I've encountered the demonic in ways that have blown my mind. More than that, I've seen the reason, the glory, and the power of Christ in her like nowhere else in my experience. Even more than that, my wife has walked through the same visions with her, as they both described them to me.

I suspect that at times my friend has battled Satan himself. He tempts her to hide in shame, to curl up in a ball. He tempts her to curse herself and say, "I hate myself. I despise myself."

As a child, she was terribly abused and left in a closet. As a young woman, it happened again. Satan tells her that's where she belongs (hiding with Eve in the dark). But, you see, the snake is in the dark; the Dragon is in the closet.

Jesus has shown her He has gone there too, to suffer with her. She is terrified to let Jesus in, because of shame, but He has shown her in visions her scars are His scars. Her blood is on His body; He's romanced her out of the closet. In visions, He has taken her out of those closets and hundreds of other metaphorical closets, and He has covered her in righteousness.

Into the vision, I've prayed, "Jesus, would you show her how *you* see her?" He holds up a mirror. She looks, and she's wearing a dress—a wedding dress entirely white. She gasps in awe and wonder. It's a dress she owns. She bought it as an act of devotion some time ago.

I think my friend is free now of the old rituals and curses and demonic assignments. I think she's almost entirely free of the old fears. But this last year was the hardest. I would preach on the Revelation, and then I'd see the battle fought in her.

During that time, in the heat of the battle, I commanded my friend to hang the wedding dress on her bedroom door and remember what Jesus told her . . . remember how priceless she is, and invite Him into her room and into her bed, her forever Bridegroom, to hold her and to love her. When the dress was on the door and she believed the Gospel, the Dragon was bound.

Now I've seen it happen. She is not her past. She's redeemed. It's the most beautiful and stunning faith I've ever seen. She's walked through the door in the Valley of Trouble, and nothing is more beautiful in all creation than the Bride of Christ.

My friend's story and her life and what I've seen has blown my mind. It seems so strange yet totally familiar; for I've heard the Snake's whispers all my life: "Hey, Peter, you're a pussy. You suck. You're a piece of crap. Your sermon is stupid; we all think you're an idiot. Go sit in the closet, curl up in a ball, and die."

Bride of Christ, you've heard that voice too. But . . . *believe* the Gospel; *step* on the Snake's head; never, ever hide in shame again.

The epilogue is next week. But we're at the end of the book, the end of the sixth day, and man has been created in the image of God. He has God's glory. What *is* man? — A Bride that reflects the glory of her Groom. She is created at the bleeding side of Jesus, and *nothing* is more glorious in all creation.

So the last Adam whispers, "Eve, Eve . . . look what I've done! Come out of the shadows. Two shall become one body, and we will dance in the Father's light."

In Jesus' name, this is the commandment of God:
Believe! Amen.

Further Reading

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. . . . So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

—Genesis 2:24-25, 3:6-8

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. . . . And they shall be called The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought out, a city not forsaken.

—Isaiah 62:1-5, 12

“And when I passed by you, and saw you weltering in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live, and grow up like a plant of the field.’ And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. . . . But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by. . . . yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.”

-Ezekiel 16:6-8, 15, 60-63

Say to your brother, “My people,” and to your sister, “She has obtained pity.” “Plead with your mother, plead--for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband--that she put away her harlotry from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a parched land, and slay her with thirst. . . . Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at

the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Ba'al.' For I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD."

—Hosea 2:1-3, 14-20

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

—Ephesians 5:25-27

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who is seated upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the dwellers on earth have become drunk." And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. . . . Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me

the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

—Revelation 17:1-3, 21:9-11

Sexual imagery is universal in human religious experience. But when the living God in whose presence Moses had to remove his shoes, is presented as a cuckold husband who relentlessly pursues His wayward wife, some Christians have protested that this is not only an outrageous symbol but a blasphemous one. Why? Because the prophet Hosea implies that God is sexually aroused in the presence of His people. . . . Have you ever been sexually aroused to an intense degree? Really stimulated in a sensuous way? Passionately turned on? Both the Scripture and the liturgy of the Christian community say that human sexual arousal is but a pale imitation of God's passion for His people. That is why human love, though it's the best image we have, is still an inadequate image of God's love. Not because it overdoes it, but because human desire with all its emotion cannot compare with the passionate yearning of Jesus Christ. That is why saints can only stutter and stammer about the reality, why Blaise Pascal on his famous night of fire, November 21, 1654, could not speak a word, why Bede Griffiths wrote, "The love of Jesus Christ is not a mild benevolence; it is a consuming fire."

—Brennan Manning, *Lion & Lamb*

Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success,

popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, “Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody.” . . . [My dark side says] I am no good . . . I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned. *Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life* because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the “Beloved.” Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Life of the Beloved*

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.”

—Matthew 5:14

Shyness is an obnoxious form of vanity.

—Fulton Oursler

My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely. . . .” My beloved is mine and I am his, he pastures his flock among the lilies.

—Song of Solomon 2:10-14, 16

Come, Lord Jesus!

Drink Till Drunk . . . by God
(Revelation 22)

Genesis 3:24, the Great Veiling: “God drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

REVELATION 22:1-5: *Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.*

We sure would like to get to that tree of life and that river of the water of life, because sometimes we feel like we’re going to just *die* of thirst.

At the beginning of *The Silver Chair* in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the girl Jill finds herself alone, guilty, and terribly thirsty in a different world. She has just done a very prideful and stupid thing, so she cries and cries and then finds

herself extremely thirsty. She spies a beautiful stream across a meadow. (Her thirst increases ten times.) As she turns to the stream, she suddenly freezes in her tracks, for in front of the stream is an immense lion . . . like the flaming sword before the tree of life. The lion looks at her as if it knows her.

“If I run away, it’ll be after me in a moment,” thought Jill. “And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth.” Anyway, she couldn’t have moved if she had tried, and she couldn’t take her eyes off it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

“If you’re thirsty, you may drink.”

. . . for a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, “If you are thirsty, come and drink” . . . it was the Lion speaking . . . and the voice was not like a man’s. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her any less frightened than she had been before, but it made her frightened in rather a different way.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

“I’m *dying* of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a

look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realised that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“*Do* you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

Jesus is the Lion in Revelation 5: “Lo, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered.”

He is the Lion, and He’s not a *tame* Lion. Like Mr. Beaver said, “Safe? . . . Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe.”

See, I think we’re just like Jill: dreadfully thirsty, and

we're beginning to see the river and the tree. The New Jerusalem is coming down, and Jesus says, "Let him who is thirsty come," and we say, "Thank you! . . . but there's a lion in the way. Could the lion go . . . somewhere else . . . *somewhen* else . . . *please?*"

If not, we try to tame the Lion. Human religion is man's quest to make the holy God tame, to make the awesome God trivial. Dorothy Sayers wrote: "We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him 'Meek and mild,' and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies."

I've always longed for the water of life and the power of God, but I remember the first time I saw a demon cast out of a man. (And it wasn't subtle; it wasn't manipulative hype; it was obviously real and incredibly powerful and meaningful.) I remember I was *terrified* . . . not of the demon but of the One who cast it out . . . not of my friend Scott but of the One whose name he invoked: Jesus, the Lion of Judah.

I was terrified because it was entirely obvious that at any moment He could *eat* me, if He so desired. So I tried to remember how He looked on the flannel graph in Sunday School: "Meek and mild." I had an insatiable longing for trivia (meaningless things). I prayed, "God, could I just watch *I Love Lucy* for a while?" (hide from the Meaning in trivia).

I'm so thankful for this church. Last week, caught up in what I was saying, at two of the services I used a politically incorrect potty word in quoting Satan, rather than the more socially acceptable potty word. I believe I was biblical in my usage, and I meant what I said. Well, I'm so thankful for this church, for there are many, many churches from which I would have been fired this week.

I've wondered, How can the Evangelical Church get so sidetracked by trivia? Do we really believe the meaning,

that Satan, the Ancient Dragon, wars against the Church? Because I just can't imagine a war movie where the soldiers are so easily offended by the nuances of potty words. Do we *believe* "the time is at hand"? That we are the Bride and the Word—the Meaning—the Bridegroom—stands waiting to fill us with life and joy?

- Maybe we're *starting* to believe the Meaning, so we hide from the Meaning in trivia.
- Maybe we're not really offended at trivia; we're offended by *Him*, by "the gold lion, the bearded bull— which breaks through the hedges and scatters the kingdom of our primness" (Lewis).
- Maybe the Lion begins to scare us because He's *not* trivial. So we hide in trivia.
- Maybe He's not just words.
- Maybe He's not just metaphors.

REVELATION 22:6-7: "*These words are faithful and true.*"

The Revelation is *not* a metaphor. In Revelation 19, Jesus is *called* "Faithful and True." He's alive, He's the Word, He's the Meaning; and from His mouth comes a sword; the sword pierces to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow.

He cuts us; we don't cut Him; He's not a metaphor; He is the meaning; He is the Word that cuts us before the tree of life.

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

The Lion scares us, so we try to keep Him trivial. And we try to keep Him distant. But these things must take place "quickly" ("taxi" in Greek.) It doesn't mean "soon" as much as "without delay"; "at once." It's the word used by the angel at the tomb on Easter morning when he says to the women, "Go tell the disciples *at once*."

The Revelation of Jesus has been happening ever since that morning. "The *kairos* [time] is at hand" (Revelation 22:10). "Chronos [time] shall be no more" (Revelation 10:6).

In Daniel, Daniel is instructed to "seal up the scroll" because it pertains to the distant future and the time of the end. In the Revelation, John is told to "not seal up the scroll" because the time is at hand.

Eternal life (*kairos*) invades temporal existence (*chronos*) *now* . . . whenever we walk by faith, and ultimately at the end of the age, which I believe is also the day your body dies and you breathe your last breath.

But Jesus and His kingdom are not distant, not just in the distant past or just in the future on some chart. Jesus is not distant.

He is *The Bridegroom* standing with longing at the bedroom door.

He is *The Wind* that blows through your soul, crying

