

## **Thank God for “Me” (The Glorious Appearing . . . and Disappearing)**

Revelation 20:4-15

#38 in our series “The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation”

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November 18, 2018

### **Prayer**

Father, we ask that you would help us to preach. I pray for those that are new that when things are confusing that they would hang in there and realize that it will make some sense at some point. For those who have been here for every sermon through our Revelation series, I pray that you would help them connect the dots and not to think to themselves, “*Oh I’ve heard this before*” but that they would be able to see you in a new way.

The picture that unfolds in Scripture of who you is overwhelmingly stunning to me; sometimes I just despair that there is no possible way I could even talk about it and I guess that’s the truth. But Holy Spirit, you know how to talk about it; you reveal the Father and you reveal the Son so would you do that this morning as we preach? In Jesus’ name, we ask it, Amen.

### **Message**

One particular day along about 1967 ( I was about seven), my friend Tim found something utterly amazing in a field. He took me into his room pulled it out from under the bed. And I gazed in absolute wonder at his treasure—I saw things I’d never seen before; it was a Playboy magazine.

That night at dinner, I couldn’t sit still; I longed to run and hide. I was being tormented. The torment came from my father’s (and my Heavenly Father’s) presence—not because my father was bad, but because he was good; and not because he had taught me that naked ladies were bad. Actually, he taught me that they were more than just good; they were holy. Even at seven, I knew that the problem wasn’t with naked ladies but how I had taken knowledge of them in Tim’s room.

My dad rarely spanked, but he would speak, and the Word would burn. I remember thinking at times, “*Dad just hit me or ground me, but stop talking—no more words!*”

Well that night, I wanted to run and hide, for his presence was torment to my soul. And yet, I didn’t want to hide, for the outer darkness was even worse. And so I cracked... I said, “Dad, can I talk to you?”

We went up to my room; we sat next to each other on my bed . . . Actually, I remember lying on my back pressing my feet against the underside of the top bunk, and through tears, just spilling my soul.

When I finished my confession . . . I didn't hear a word of condemnation. I think he kissed me; he was always giving me kisses. And then, he looked me in the face, and with a voice of deepest compassion, he said, "Peter are you going to be OK?" And then I think he said, "I love you," and "I'm proud of you." And then he left the room.

My dad died about fourteen years ago . . . And what felt like the worst torment, for about an hour one night long ago in 1967, has now become, and actually always was, my deepest desire . . . that is simply to be with my Dad, my Abba, my Father. I was the apple of His eye... I discovered who I am by looking at the image reflected in the pupils of His eyes.

I can't say that I never looked at another Playboy magazine. But I have enjoyed a wonderfully passionate marriage for thirty-five years, largely because of that night. I've thoroughly enjoyed a holy communion in the sacrament of our covenant of marriage . . . and, like my dad, I became a pastor—not because I thought I should, but more like I just realized this is who I am. Now, I had all sorts of other motives that God would burn away in time. But somewhere in the depths of my being I just identified with my dad. I am his beloved.

I had a good dad, and you have a good Dad, the very best Dad, even though you've been listening to a snakey dragon that's been telling you otherwise.

Revelation 20:4-10 John writes,

*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed (literally, "to whom judgment was committed"). And that's weird for it's John who records Jesus as saying, "The Father... has committed all judgment to the son" (John 5:22 NKJV).*

- That means that these people are Jesus . . . or at least the Body of Jesus.

*Also, I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God (Jesus is the "word of our testimony"), and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life (literally it reads, "They lived") and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead...*

- So the living *were* dead, but *now* they're *alive*...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John records Jesus as saying, "He who lives and believes in me will never die." See that person has already been judged, and has become the body of the Judge, the body of Eternal life in space and time.

*The rest of the dead did not come to life until (so they also come to life) the thousand years were ended (finished, teleo). This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power...*

- It's like they have eternal life so for them death has died...

*but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

- John already told them that they were kings and priests (Rev. 1:6)
- In the words of Peter, “A chosen race, a royal priesthood . . . to proclaim God’s wonderful deeds . . . once you were no people, but now you are God’s people, (1 Peter 2:9)”.... He also wrote, “Don’t forget this fact, with the Lord a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day” (2 Peter 3:9).

*And when the thousand years are ended (literally, “whenever the thousand years are finished—teleo”), Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.*

- Now, we already read about this at the end of the sixth seal, sixth trumpet and sixth bowl.
- And at the seventh seal, seventh trumpet and seventh bowl; we heard a voice cry from the throne, “It is finished (16:17), “The kingdoms of the world became the kingdom of our Lord” (11:15), and the sky rolled up like a scroll (6:14).

For John the end invaded space and time and conquered all things the moment Jesus cried, “It is finished” on the tree in the Garden just outside the walls of Jerusalem; it was then that the blood began to flow, and the life in the blood began to burn all that opposed the kingdom of our God.

*And they [people at war with the Lamb] marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur (theion from theos—also translated “divine being”) where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (“ages and ages,” aions and aions)*

That’s what we preached on last time. Next verse:

Revelation 20:11-15

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence (literally, “His face”) earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books (plural) were opened. Then another book (singular) was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books (plural), according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 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.*

I went to seminary in the 1980’s and at that time everything was about church growth. Traditionally, a good Protestant, Reformed worship service always included the Proclamation of the Word (that’s what the sermon was called), the confession of sins and the assurance of pardon, and that was worship. By the 1980’s the sermon was more like a sales pitch, followed by a call to make a decision and a commitment—what Scripture calls a covenant.

So, a modern preacher didn’t proclaim the eternal covenant of God, which is God’s Judgment and His Word. A modern preacher made a pitch, asked people to judge the Word and then make a covenant.

So, a modern preacher would preach the “Judgment of the Great White Throne” by saying something like this:

Wouldn’t you like to live and reign with Jesus in His kingdom?  
And wouldn’t you hate to be endlessly burned by eternal fire?  
So, choose Jesus (by supporting the budget, or whatever)...  
Choose Jesus so God doesn’t judge you and cast you into Hell.

It’s an effective shtick for building institutions, but not so much for getting folks to fall in love with God, and even more it’s just terrible exegesis of the text.

Here’s the problem:

For one:

The Great White Throne Judgment is not a threat of endless death in Hell.  
The Great White Throne Judgment is the end of Hell and the death of death.

We just read, “Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire.”

In just five verses, the voice from the throne will say, “Death will be no more.”

Hell cannot be a place of endless death if death and hades come to an end in the Lake of Fire. Hades is the Greek word most often translated as Hell in English New Testaments (Ten times it's translated as Hell in the King James and once as the Grave... It's the realm of the dead... lie Sheol in the Old Testament)

Gehenna is the other word often translated as Hell in English New Testaments (The King James translates it as "Hell" nine times and "Hellfire" three times)

Gehenna was the valley that surrounded Jerusalem on two sides.  
To enter the city, from the outer darkness, you often passed through Gehenna.

Gehenna was also called Tophet, which means "place of fire."  
And according to Isaiah, it was the breath of God that set it ablaze...  
*"The breath of Yahweh, like a stream of brimstone doth kindle it..."* writes Isaiah (30:33) . . . breath of God.

Wasn't it the breath of God, breathed into a ball of dust that made you in the first place?  
And doesn't the Word of God ride on the Breath of God? The Word of God is the Judgment of God.

God is One. God is Love. And God is a Consuming Fire. We're talking about "the Lake of Fire and *theion*" or "fire that *is theion*." *Theion* comes from *theos* and means brimstone or Divinity. So, it can be translated sulfur or Divinity. You can look at the etymology of sulfur, and it comes from that idea; it is like the breath of God that sets things ablaze.

The Lake of Fire is the death of death; it swallows up death forever.  
And that can only be God.

Isaiah 25:6 "*On this mountain [Mt. Zion, surrounded by Gehenna] the Lord of hosts will make a feast... and destroy the veil that covers all people... and He, God, will swallow up death forever.*"

The Lake of Fire, that is Divinity, is the death of death, who *is* Eternal Life.  
In the End, death is swallowed by Life, and death is no more.  
Temporality is swallowed by Eternity and makes all things become new.  
Outer darkness comes to an End that is the lake of Light.  
Lost-ness comes to an End in the lake of "foundness," that is "the way."  
Lies come to an End in the lake of truth—*the* Truth.  
Death comes to an End in the lake of Light, Way, Truth, and Life.

And the Life is in the blood, that was shed on the tree in the Garden at the end of the sixth day of creation, the sixth day of the week, at the sixth hour.  
It was then, that eternity invaded time, and it's there, that all things are made new; it is the judgment of God. "I am not" comes to an end in the Lake of "I Am."

Well anyway, that's one problem with the way we've preached this text:

1. The Great White Throne Judgment is not the beginning of some endless Hell.  
The Great White Throne Judgment is the end of temporal Hell and the presence of Eternal Way, Truth, Life, and Light.

2. Another problem with the way this has been preached is that although this is the final Judgment, it's already happened... is happening... and will happen.

For John there's only one Judgment:

- John 3, Jesus says this is the Judgment (one Judgment), "*The light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light.*"
- John 12, Jesus says, "*Now is the judgment of this world; now is the ruler of this world cast out.*"
- The New Testament (1 Cor. 10:11, Heb. 9:26) refers to Christ's sacrifice on the tree as the end of the *aions*, the ages. That would be the Last Judgment.
- Revelation 21:6 and 22:13 Jesus says, "*I am... the end.*" "*I am the beginning and the end, the first and last, the Alpha and the Omega*"

Paul refers to the mere appearing of Jesus as the Judgment.

- In 2 Thessalonians, he calls it the Epiphany of His appearing, the *epihanao* of His *parousia*, that is the manifestation of His *parousia*.
- *Parousia* is the Greek word often translated coming, but according to scholars like Karl Barth it means something like "effective presence."

You might remember when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the mount of transfiguration, and when He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, and when He appeared to John at the start of the Revelation, and when He appeared as the rider on the white horse, He appeared as a man filled with fire and shining as the sun—that's effective presence, His *parousia*, His glorious appearing—and it's all "the Judgment."

Maybe we should stop thinking *chronologically*, and start thinking *theologically*  
...that is *Logically*...that is according to the *Logos*—the Word.

Maybe space and time are relative, and the Word is not.

Maybe all things are relative to the Word, who is the Light, who is the Judgment...and like the angel said, "*Chronos* will be no more." (10:6)

Well anyway, there are some problems with the way we've been reading Rev. 20

1. It's not the beginning of Hell, but the end of Hell.
2. It's not just final judgment, but every judgment... it's the Judgment &
3. It's not the Judgment of the living and the dead... but just the *dead*.

Check it out: it's not the living standing before the throne, v.12, it's the dead—it's a pack of zombies. Churches often confess, "*We believe in the judgment of the living and the dead,*" **but** this is the judgment of *the dead*... Actually, in John (and maybe all the New Testament), everyone is dead until they've been judged by the Living One... (He's in the last and least of these) AND THEN, once they live, they're no longer judged.

The living aren't judged; they've *been* judged. Listen to Jesus in John 5:24 "*Truly, truly I say to you... whoever believes has eternal life. He does not come into Judgment but has passed from death to life.*" Actually, Jesus describes all of Revelation 20 in John chapter 5.

Well anyway, there are some problems with the way we've been reading...

And perhaps the solution is simply to believe the Word...

And yet, that does raise a fascinating question:

Who are the dead?... and who, when and where are the living?

Well, we just read about the living in the last paragraph...

"They live and reign with Christ" for a thousand years...

OK, so when and where is that thousand years?

Remember what we've been talking about all along:



The seven-sealed scroll in the right hand of God reminded us of . . .

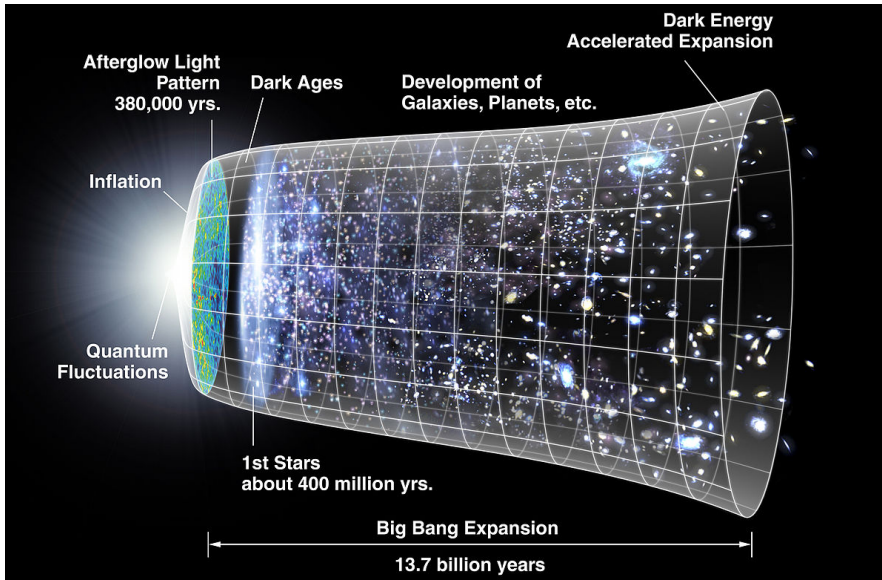
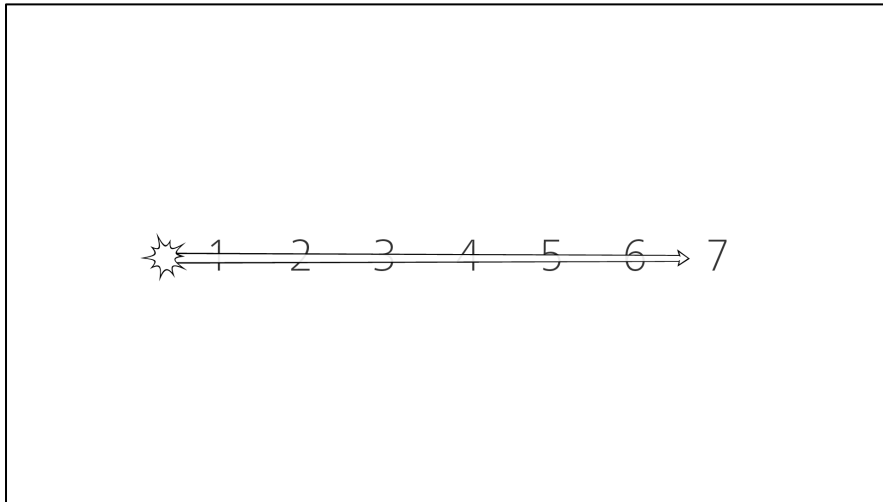


Figure 1 Image credit: NASA / WMAP science team  
All the ages of space and time... the Cosmos.

Peter begins singing: "He's got the whole Cosmos in his hands; He's got the whole world in his hands."



It reminded us of the entire Cosmos, for in Genesis, the entire Cosmos is created in seven days... and on the Seventh Day everything is good, and “it is finished,” and God rests.

Well, because Genesis is written this way...

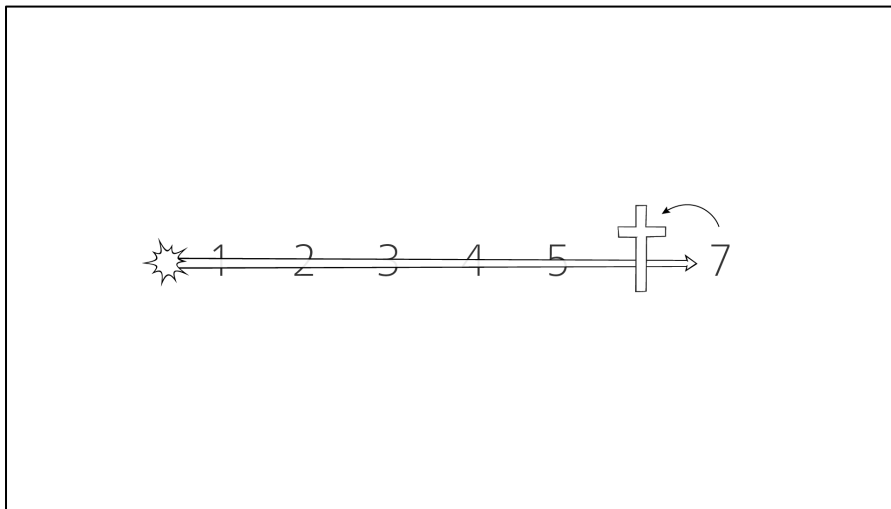
And because all is not yet good...

And because man doesn't yet appear to be finished in the image of God...

And because with God “a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day...” (not *is* a day but *as* a day)

Well, many Jews thought and still think that the creation is not finished, but will be finished when the Messiah comes 6000 years from the moment of creation and inaugurates the messianic kingdom on earth.

Using this formula, they calculated that He must come by nightfall on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2240...

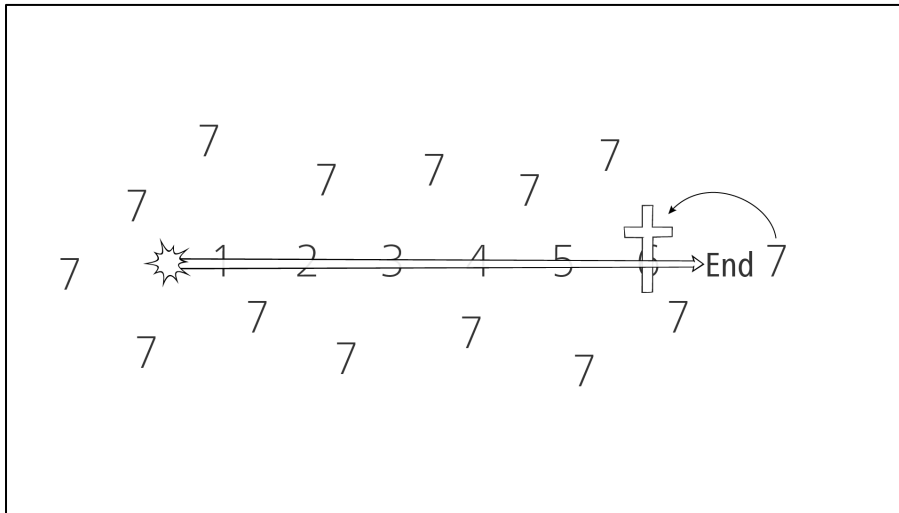


Well, Christians believe that He's already come, and many in John's day believed that the Messianic Kingdom began when Jesus cried, “*It is finished*” in the Garden on the Tree on the Mountain next to Jerusalem at the end of the sixth day.

At the cross, God's promised rest invaded space and time.

Or you could say the Lord of the Sabbath was revealed in space and time.

So, the biblical view of time is something like this [See the next page]:



God creates all things in six, days, *yoms*, *aions* or ages...

And on the Seventh Day, “it is finished” and everything is good.

The Seventh Day is God’s promised rest.

The Seventh Day is a different kind of day; it’s eternal; it’s *aionios*; it’s God’s age, and you see God is not bound by space and time. He *made* space and time.

God is the beginning and the end and He doesn’t change—that’s eternal.

Jesus is also the beginning and the end and He doesn’t change, says Scripture.

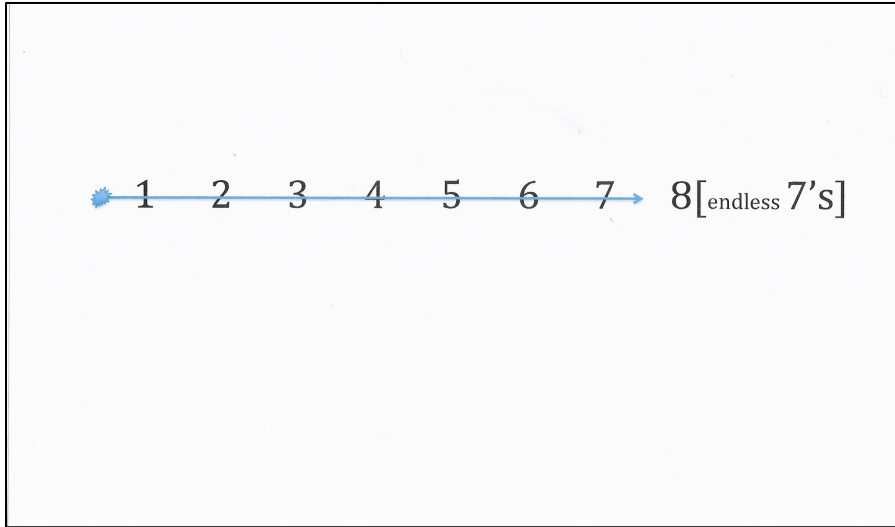
He is eternal, and like He said, “His Kingdom is at hand.”<sup>i</sup>

So God is always present, even though we are usually unaware.<sup>ii</sup>

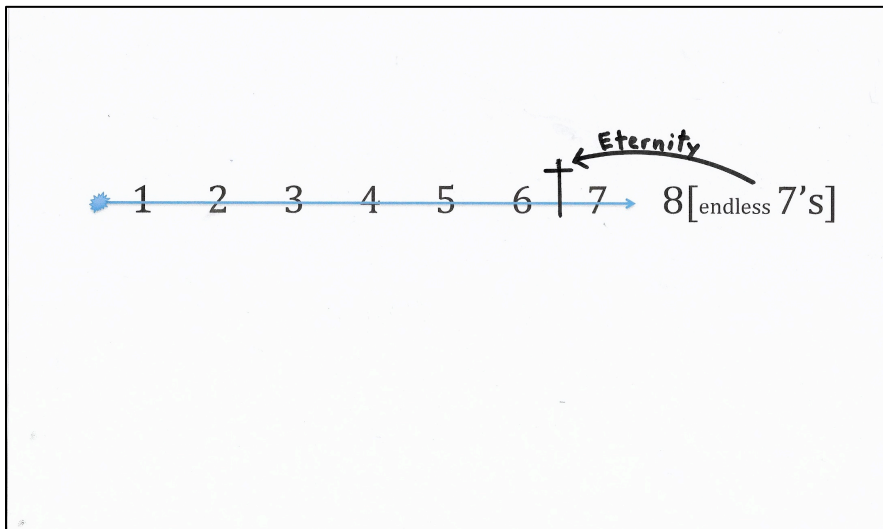
But through His death and resurrection, His Glory is revealed in space and time

And we see that God is Love, and Love conquers all—even “me.”

This is why we work six days and rest on the Seventh—to remember eternity.



Once a year at the end of the feast of ingathering or tabernacles, the Jews were also commanded to celebrate an Eighth Day as an endless Seventh Day—an eternal Sabbath, the *shemini atzeret*.

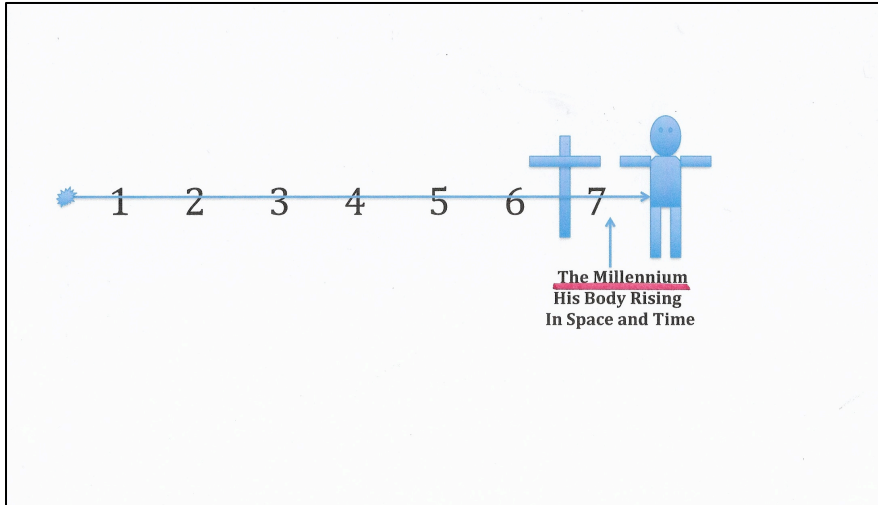


Jesus was crucified at the end of the sixth day and rose on the Eighth Day.

***So who, when, and where are the living?***

Maybe they're, right now, right here.

Maybe they're us; that's what we preached last time.



I think this is the Millennium.

We are the Body of Christ is Rising in space and time . . .

The Eternal rising in temporality.<sup>iii</sup>

***So who, when and where are the living?*** You know, I think we saw them following the Word of God and conquering with Him... they appeared with Him, dressed as Him and riding white horses.

- And we read that "the lamb conquers and those with him."
- They conquer "by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony."
- We read that the one who conquers will eat from the tree of life, not be hurt by the second death, have his name in the book of life, sit on the throne of God, with God and rule over the nations. "The one who conquers"
- In 1<sup>st</sup> John, John writes, *"Everyone born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world [the Cosmos]—our faith."*

Jesus said, *"All things are possible to him who believes."*

He is the Lion that looks like a lamb but conquers all things.

One could argue that the most influential person of the 17<sup>th</sup> century wasn't a king or a pope but a peasant named Lawrence. As a young man God seemed to speak to him, one day, as he simply meditated on a tree and thought of death comes to life like a tree in spring.

He joined a monastery and served as a cook and fixer of sandals until he died in relative obscurity at eighty years of age. Because he was known for such kindness, and relentless joy, Lawrence was interviewed by the servant of a French cardinal, named Abbe de Beaufort.

Those interviews, along with a few notes from Lawrence himself, were preserved in a little book titled, *The practice of the Presence of God*. And that's all it is, just a few thoughts on practicing the constant awareness of the presence of God . . . **And yet**, it's been read by millions and Larry has changed the world.

Brother Lawrence writes, "*All things are possible to him who believes; still more to him who hopes; still more to him who loves; and most of all to him who does all three.*" Faith Hope and Love are eternal; that means *you* can't make them, but *they* make you—the new and Eternal You. They're not *your* choice, but *God's* choice rising in you.

### ***So, who are the Living?***

Well, in Revelation 20, they are those that have their names written in *the Lamb's Book of Life*—and you see, that's not their choice that's the Lamb's choice; that's the Judgment of God.

### ***And who are the Dead?***

Well, in Revelation 20, they are those who are judged according to the things written in *the books, according to what they'd done*. And what they've done is their choice; it is *their* judgment.

On the sixth day of creation, the snake tempted each of us to take from the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil to make ourselves in the image of God. The knowledge of Good and evil is called the Law. And the energy with which we try to fulfill the law to make ourselves in the image is called the flesh. So, in the words of Paul, the enemy tempted each of us to justify ourselves by works of the law in the power of our own flesh.

I hope you noticed (in Revelation 20) that "the dead," ("great and small") are judged by their deeds. And none are justified by their deeds; indeed all of them are *already* dead; it's like they died the day that they took the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil from the tree! So now, even their good deeds are like filthy rags.

"A man must fail miserably," wrote George MacDonald, "or succeed even more miserably."

We'll talk about this more next week, but when we try to justify ourselves . . .

We don't create ourselves but desecrate ourselves.

We turn into beasts that consume life, trying to make ourselves alive.

We turn into harlots that use Love and end up crucifying Love.

We become the antichrist, which means imitation Christ.

We put our faith in "me is Salvation" and crucify "God is Salvation," Jesus.

We exalt ourselves and Jesus called that the abomination of desolation.

Believing the lie of the devil, we crucify Christ and put our flesh on the devil.

As Jesus said to the Pharisees, who tried to justify themselves before men:

*"You are of your father the devil."  
"The day you eat of it you will die."*



Scripture says that they crucified Jesus because they were jealous of Jesus. They wanted to be Jesus—who is the perfect image of the invisible God.

And yet, this is God's Judgment: "Let us make them in our own image."  
But this is the evil one's lie: "You should make yourself in God's image."

"The dead" try to make themselves in the image, and that's why they're judged by the deeds in the books; they want to be judged by their deeds recorded in the books; they want to be judged by their resume. In other words, the dead think that they are their ego.

"The day you eat of it you will die," that wasn't *a* sin . . . that was *all* sin.  
So the moment we took knowledge of the Good from the tree, the Life died and we die, and all our subsequent "good deeds" are just an illusion. God said to Moses, *"Whosoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book."*

And yet, even as He said it, He was teaching Moses about the Slaughtered Lamb. The Lion is a Lamb and He has a book, the names in the book are written in blood. He gives His Life to whom He chooses. And that's why we believe, and that's how we are finished in the image and likeness of God.

To *take* knowledge of the Good from the tree is to justify your self.



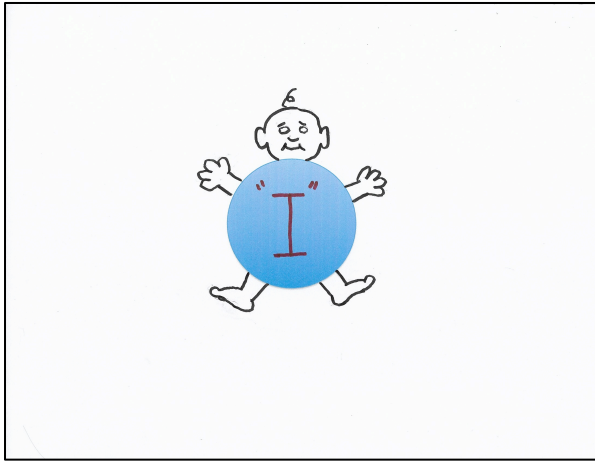
To *receive* knowledge of the Good from the tree is to be justified... by body broken and blood shed.

The dead try to make themselves in the image of God, who is the Good.  
And the Living believe they are the image of God because the Lamb of God has written their name in His book of Life... and that's the Good... He is the Good and the Life—  
Yahweh is Salvation, Yeshua, Jesus.

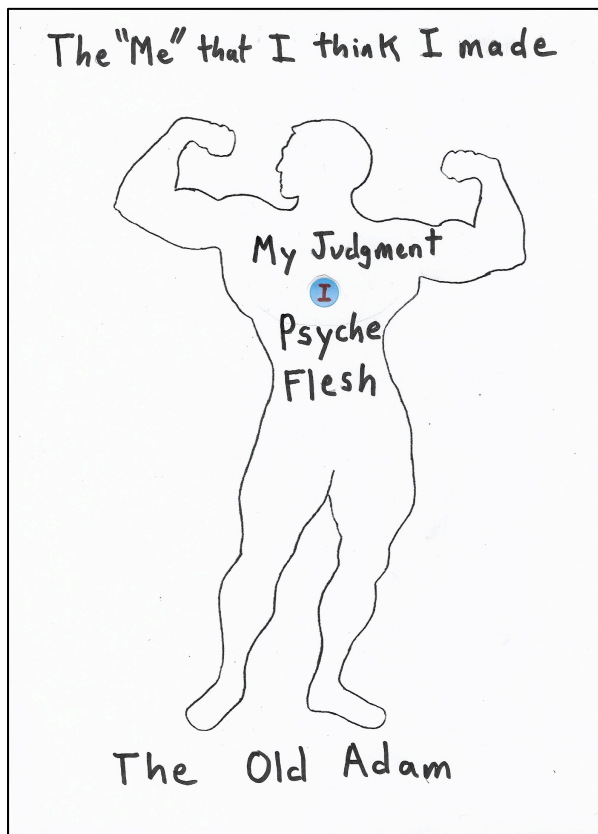
So anyway, the dead get thrown into the Lake of Eternal Fire.  
And the living rule and reign with Christ, who is God.

And so, of course, we want to know, which am I?  
One of the dead or one of the Living?  
Well, hopefully by now, you see: You're probably both.

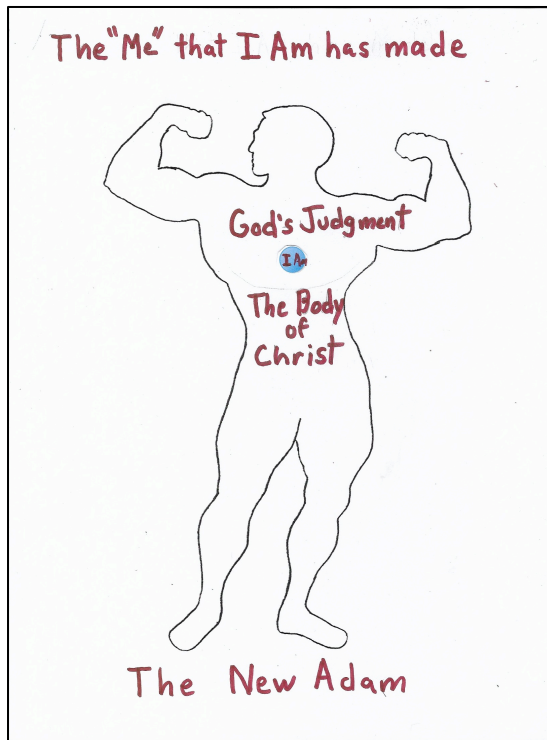
It's what we've been preaching . . .  
There is a "me" that I think I make.  
And there is a "me" that I AM has made.



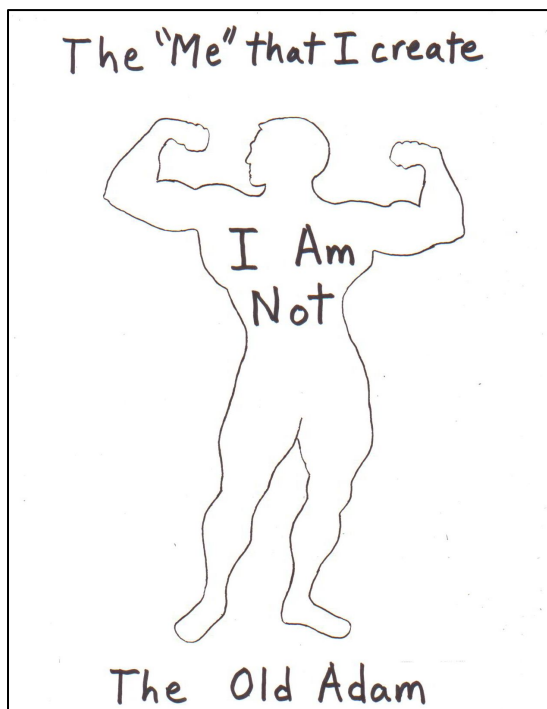
We each have a spirit that is the breath of God and God is eternal. That Spirit is who I am... I am eternal, and I observe "me" in space and time.



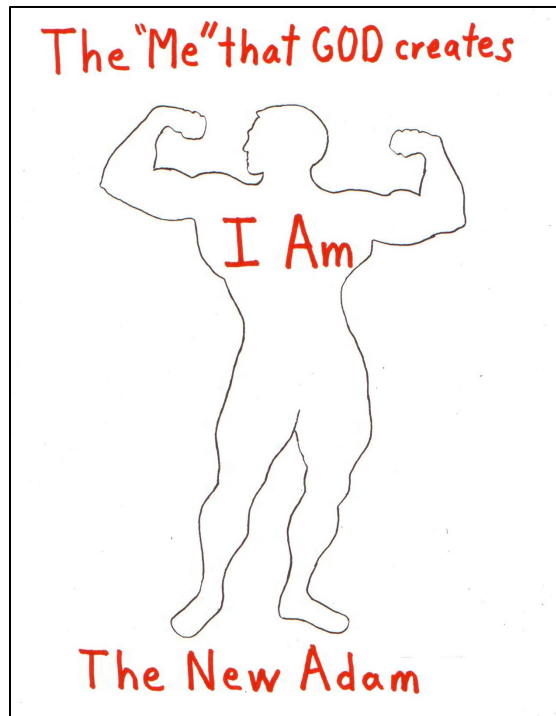
We each have a self that we think we have created in time with our choices. It's our psyche in a body of flesh; it's the "me" that I think "I" made.



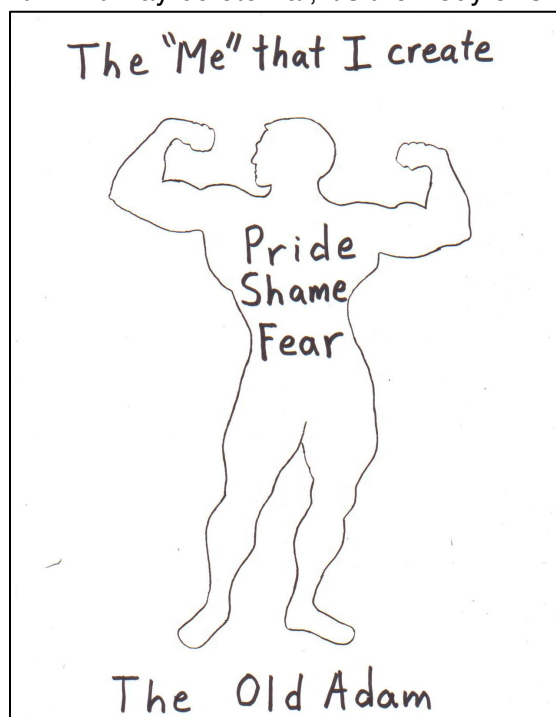
But there is a "me" that "I Am" has made.



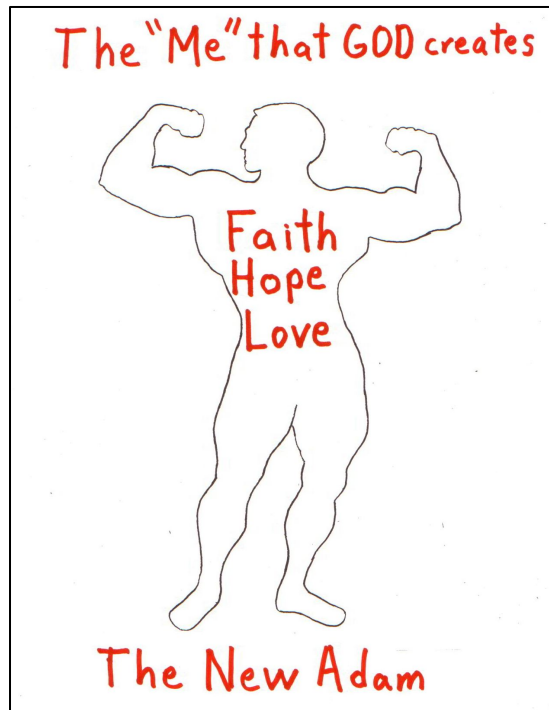
The "me" that I think "I" create, is who "I am not." It's a passing illusion.



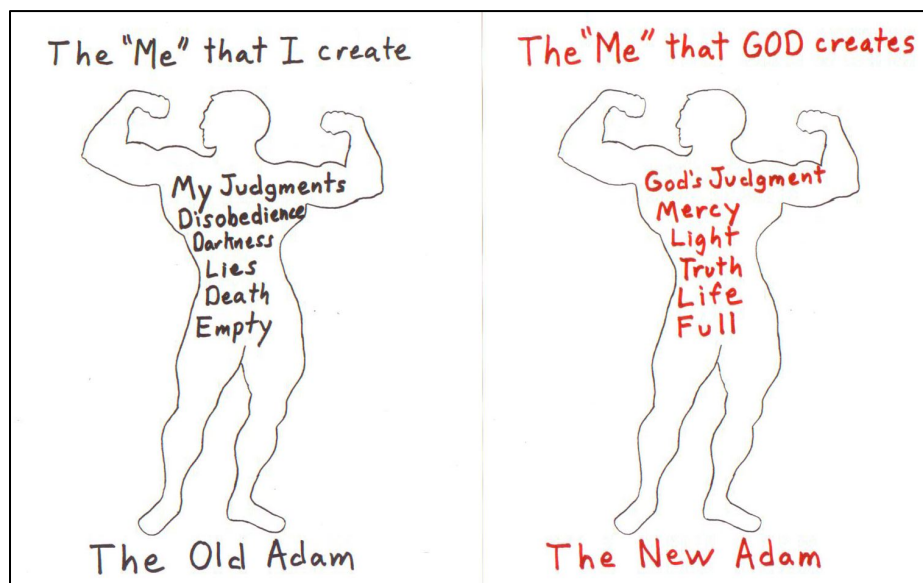
And the "me" that God has created is who I am.  
I think it may be eternal; it's the Body of Christ.



The "me" that "I" create is pride, shame, and fear.



The "me" that God has created is Faith, Hope, and Love.



The "me" that "I" create is my judgments: disobedience, darkness, lies and death. It's temporal and hollow... it's empty space and time

The "me" that God creates is His Judgment: Mercy, Light, Truth and Life... it's the fullness of all my space and time.

In the words of Saint Paul, you have an old adam—an old body of death that can do nothing but sin, for it's the spawn of the devil. And you have a New Adam, who is eternal, indestructible, cannot die, and is actually incapable of sin for He is entirely free a *truly* free will.

In 1 John 3, John writes, "Whoever sins is of the devil... for this purpose the son of God appeared, to destroy the works of the devil. Whoever's been born of God does not sin... for he cannot sin."

See? You have a self that is dead and can do nothing but sin.  
And a self that is alive and is incapable of sin.

*"He who loves is born of God and knows God," writes John*  
*"And he who does not love does not know God."*

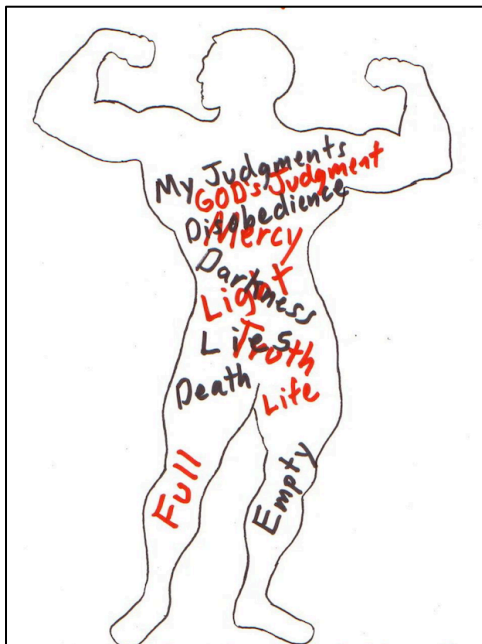
I bet you love at times and don't love at other times.

- Well when you love, it's God in you that's loving; God is Love.

- And when you don't love... well; that's just the old you, the spawn of the devil.

In John's Gospel chapter 10 to a group of Jews that were about to stone him, whom he previously referred to as the spawn of the devil, Jesus says, "Is it not written in your law... you are gods."

See? Jesus acted as if eternity was buried deep in even the worst of hearts.  
He acted as if every dirty field contained buried treasure.



He spoke as if each of us were a field containing wheat and tares or wheat and weeds.  
As if each of us was grain and chaff.  
As if each of us was sheep and goat.  
As if each of us was spirit and flesh.

And here's the rub, *"That which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of spirit is spirit..."* Flesh can't just decide to be spirit.

A goat can't decide to be a sheep; the chaff can't decide to be grain.

Weeds can't decide to be wheat; a heart of stone can't decide to be flesh.

A will cannot just will a new will; evil cannot decide to be Good.

Nothing... cannot decide to be something, and the dead cannot decide to live.

***So we read about the Judgment, and we all panic asking how can I change?***

*Give me some knowledge of Good so I can choose the good, make myself Good and save my soul. **How can "I" change "me"?***

Well listen to the Judgment of God: **You can't.**

I mean, you must lose your psyche, (that's your "me") to find it.

I mean, you must die . . . and be born again.

Now, that's a terrifying judgment . . . and then profoundly Good News.

For you see, my biggest problem, actually my only problem, is "me."

More specifically that I can't change me; all my anxiety, fear, shame and stress is due to the fact that I can't seem to change "me" . . . at least not for the better.

But if what I'm saying is true, there is no "me" to change.

- There is an old me, that only sins and can't be fixed, for it's already condemned, for in fact it's actually nothing, but an illusion.
- And there is a New Me, that can do nothing but good, and so never needs to be fixed, it's actually Christ in me, who is eternal.

So, there is a *temporal "me"* that's not me... and an *eternal me* that is who I am...

There is a *"me" that cannot be justified...* and there is a *"me" that is eternally justified...* But there is no *"me" to justify*, defend, promote, worry about, or hide.

There is no *"me" to change...*

God is not a God of second chances (we need to get rid of that phrase\_; He is the Creator of new creations. You don't need a second chance; you need a new heart, a New "Me."

There is no “*me*” to *change*, but there is a “*me*” to *lose*, and an utterly fascinating “*Me*” to *be discovered*. See? Every good decision in me is the revelation of who I truly am. Unless, of course, I think I created those decisions in me and then those decisions in me define who I am not; I have killed them and created my ego, that is my sin so do I need to worry about that? No.

Now, listen to what Paul wrote, “*Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” You can’t fix the old man; you can only observe that he is dead; he is nothing—he is dead. It sounds like a horrifying judgment, but it’s the *best* possible news!

For months, I’ve been fascinated by something from *Practicing the Presence of God*. Abbe de Beaufort, who interviewed Brother Lawrence, writes:

Brother Lawrence was aware of his sins and was not at all surprised by them. “*That is my nature,*” he would say, “*the only thing I know how to do.*” He simply confessed his sins to God, without pleading with Him or making excuses.

After this, he was able to peacefully resume his regular activity of love and adoration. If Brother Lawrence didn’t sin, he thanked God for it, because only God’s grace could keep him from sinning.

Saint Paul wrote, “*Rejoice always. Don’t Worry. Thank God for everything*” (Phil. 4:4).  
I’ve tried to thank God for everything, but I still worry and sure don’t rejoice always. I’ve tried to thank God for everything, but I haven’t thanked him for me...  
Instead I’ve worried about me.

You know, it’s impossible to thank God for the old “*me*”... for the old “*me*” is the “*me*” that I thought I made so there’s no one to thank; it’s my ego. But the New “*Me*,” is the “*Me*,” I didn’t make—the *Me* that loves because it knows that it is constantly loved... because “*God is Love.*”

I can’t create love; Love creates me, by living His Life in me.  
I can’t create the real *Me*; I can only discover the “*Me*” that *has been* created . . . and buried in a field like treasure . . . or that is rising from a tomb-like eternal Life.

It’s impossible to thank God for the old *me* . . . for the moment I genuinely thank God for the old “*me*,” I discover the New “*Me*” in its place.

In the very place we were called “not his people . . . ”

We discover that we are the children of God.

In the very place the old Jerusalem was destroyed . . .

The New Jerusalem comes down.

It’s where sin increased . . .

Grace abounded all the more.

It’s from the tomb of the old self, that the New Self is born.

I had a friend who used to make beautiful bronze works of art. First, he'd fashion a figure out of wax and then encase the figure in clay. Then he'd fire the clay, which would harden the clay and melt the wax leaving a void in this earthen vessel<sup>iv</sup> . . . and then he'd pour molten bronze into the void.

One day he said to me,

"Peter it's always a religious experience for me...

I think it's how God makes me, and you, and all his people...

My sin is like that wax that forms a void...

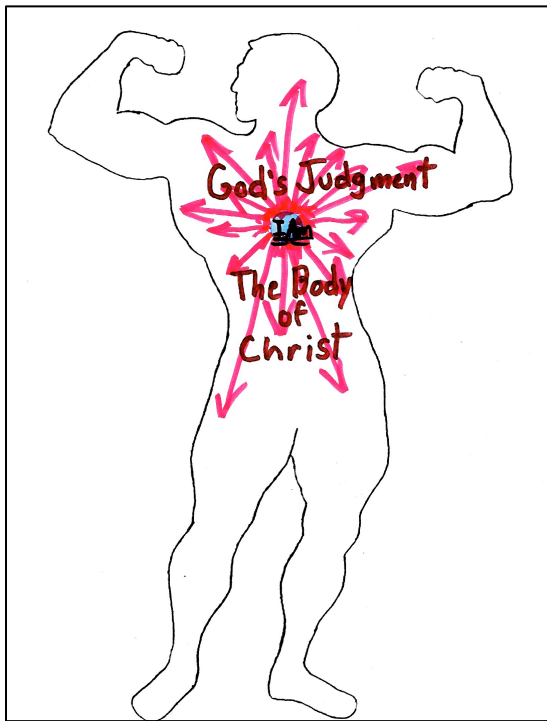
And the Grace of God is the burning hot substance of God that melts the wax and fills the void... It's faith hope and love in me and it's eternal."

Scripture teaches that the inner Sanctuary in the temple was eternal...

And separated from the outer courts of the temple with a curtain...

You *are* that temple according to Jesus.

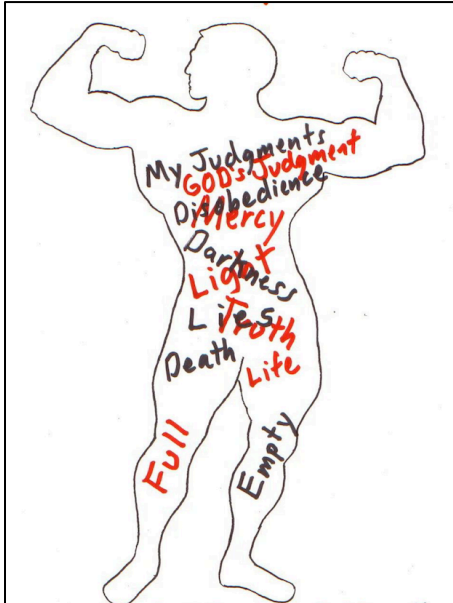
I think the great and glorious surprise may be that "I am" is hidden behind the curtain in every individual and unique temple of flesh—like breath in a ball of clay.



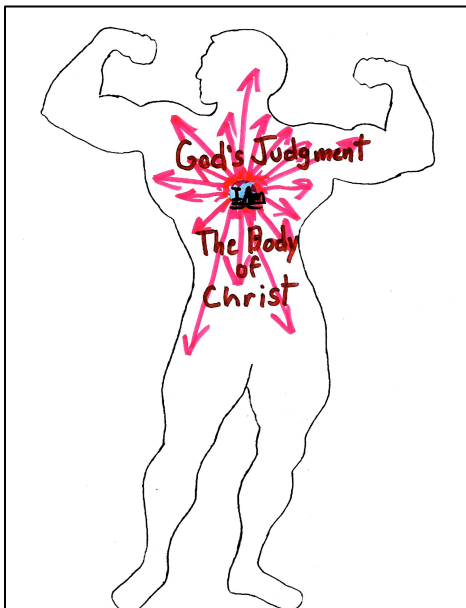
And when we see Christ die that curtain is ripped, and Love begins to fill our temple from the inside out like molten bronze that fills an earthen vessel. And so, in this way, I discover that I am the Body of Christ and image of God. And with Christ, I reign and rule from the throne in the temple of my own soul—An individual, and unique temple,

constructed by means of individual, and unique, sins that have been filled with the eternal substance of God, who is Grace.

When Jesus told the parable of the wheat and the weeds, He made it clear that we can't turn weeds into wheat, just as wax won't turn into bronze.



He also made it clear that we don't have the ability to separate one from the other, but we must wait for the Judgment.<sup>v</sup> There will be a Judgment on the last day, but when we surrender to the ever-present presence of God, when we wait on God, we come to the Judgment of the last day here and now.



We are not cast into the Lake of Fire, but the Fire wells up from a spring in the midst of our souls and fills the temple of God with the Spirit of God.

- The Fire destroys the old man—that's the glorious disappearing.
  - And the Fire reveals the New Man—the one that was buried in the prison of the old man, and the one that is revealed in the emptiness left by his passing.
- And so, I discover who I am—that's a glorious appearing.

We wonder what *we* can *do*, and I wrote this down one day. . .

I can watch "me" die, and I can watch me rise from the dead.

I can lose my life and find it.

I can observe my own creation and I am made forever grateful.<sup>vi</sup>

So then, how is the old man destroyed, and how is the new man revealed?

How do we live free of our anxiety, sin, shame, and despair?

How do we enter God's rest,

Become who we truly are,

And live in the perfect freedom of absolute and relentless love?

Well, with whatever faith God has already given you, you practice the presence of God. You sit on the side of the bed with your heavenly Dad, confess your sins and receive His mercy. Jesus said, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father..."

Jesus is the presence of God; remember that when He appears to John at the start of the Revelation; His eyes burn with fire and His face shines like the sun. He's covered in white, but John sees His feet; they are burnished bronze—as if refined by fire in a furnace (1:14). Read Psalm 22:14 and you'll discover that there was a moment on the cross in which Christ's body appeared to have been made of wax. And yet, here, it is burnished bronze or solid gold... and eternal. Here it is. You've been wax, and you will be solid gold.

Well, I hope you see that the Lake of Fire is the presence of God...

I think it's also, the fluid that Christ bleeds . . . even here, even now.

### **Communion**

And so He took the bread and broke it saying, "This is my body." The book of Hebrews says that His body is that curtain in the temple. And He took the cup; He took an empty earthen vessel and said, "This is the covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins drink of it all of you."

Do you understand?

He isn't asking you to make a covenant to try harder...

He *is* the Eternal Covenant revealed in time, that you might become who it is that you truly are.<sup>vii</sup> The cup is Fire. Amen.

Come to the table!

## Benediction

Clip from the movie *Lion King*

[Rafiki and Simba are on a walk alone at night. Rafiki is leading Simba somewhere. He pushes back some brush, points, and motions to Simba to come forward.]

Rafiki: Shh. Look down there.

[Simba tentatively moves forward, down an embankment and towards a pool of water. He looks into the water and sees his own reflection.]

Simba: That's not my father. That's just my reflection.

Rafiki: Nooo. Look haaarder.

[Simba looks into the water at first hesitantly but then a bit more deeply and with curiosity. Mufasa's reflection slowly appears in the water.]

Rafiki: You see? He lives in *you*.

[There is a bit of rumbling . . . like thunder, and then a deep voice . . .]

Mufasa: Simba.

Rafiki: Father?

Mufasa: (Appearing in the clouds and approaching Simba) Simba, you have forgotten me.

Simba: No. How could I?

Mufasa: You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me. Look inside yourself, Simba.

Mufasa: You are more than what you have become. You must take your place in the circle of life.

Simba: How can I go back? I'm not who I used to be.

Mufasa: Remember who you are. You are my son and the one true king. (Disappearing with the clouds) Remember who you are.

[Simba tries to chase after his father.]

Simba: No please. Don't leave me. Father?

Mufasa: Remember.

Simba: Don't leave me.

Mufasa: Remember.

[Rafiki approaches Simba]

Rafiki: What was that? Haha! The weather. . . very peculiar; don't you think?

Simba: Yeah. Looks like the winds are changing.

Rafiki: Aww... change is good!

Simba: Yeah. But it's not easy. I know what I have to do but going back means I have to face my past. I've been running from it for so long.

[Rafiki hits Simba on the head with a stick.]

Simba: Ow! Geez! What was that for?

Rafiki: It doesn't matter; it's in the past.

Simba: Yeah. But it still hurts.

Rafiki: Ohh yes; the past can hurt.

But the way I see it is you can either run from it or learn from it.

[Rafiki tries to hit Simba on the head again, but Simba dodges the blow]

Rafiki: Aha! See? So, what are you going to do?

Simba: First . . . I'm gonna take your stick! [Simba grabs the stick and tosses it.]

Rafiki: No no no, not the stick. [Simba runs off while Rafiki searches for the stick.]

Rafiki: Hey where are you going?

Simba: I'm going back.

Rafiki: Go on! Get out of here (laughs) Woo! Woohoo!

So, if you didn't understand the sermon, that's what I was saying: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."* He is the Lion of Judah.

Maybe you could take some time this week to practice the presence of God. Did you know? You can download a copy of *Practicing the Presence of God* for free. That might help. But practicing the presence of God is really just being aware of the presence of God wherever you are and whatever you're doing, and then doing those things for Him.

It's also important, every now and then, to just sit and look into your Father's eyes. You do that with the eyes of your heart. And when you're doing that, maybe you could just say, "Thank you Father . . . for me."

You see? When you say that it burns the old man; it destroys him because you acknowledge that you yourself are a gift. It burns the old man and the New Man appears who is the Life of the Father in you. Then you begin to live gratefully, worshipfully. You begin to live freely and that's the glorious appearing of Jesus in you. All I'm saying is believe the Gospel. Amen.

*Disclaimer: The author has not edited this document. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio or video version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.*

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<sup>i</sup> We think Jesus changes, but maybe He doesn't change; we change.

We think Light is two things (a particle and a wave), but maybe it's one and we are two.

We think God is two—Judgment and Love, but maybe God is One, and we are two—faithless and faithful.

<sup>ii</sup> 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?

—Søren Kierkegaard

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew pictures this in His Gospel: *"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after [literally, "with"] his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. (28:50-53)"*

Jesus dies, the curtain rips, and the dead rise. . . . But they come out of their tombs "with Jesus" and enter the city of Jerusalem on the Eighth Day. When I surrender to Christ at the cross, I rise from the dead, but my New Man is trapped in the prison of this old body of flesh and a sinful psyche. I have eternal life, but it exists in the tomb that is this old "body of death." The day my body dies is the day I finally leave this tomb and find myself entirely free of doubt, fear, anxiety, shame, and pain. I find myself in the Eternal City.

<sup>iv</sup> The word "wax" appears four times in Scripture. It's used to refer to transient things like mountains, valleys, and wickedness—all which melt in the presence of God. But in Psalm 22, which Jesus quotes on the cross, the speaker says, "My heart is melted within me like wax." On the cross, Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us. He was emptied for us that we might be filled with Him. On the cross, our old man is destroyed and our New Man is revealed.

<sup>v</sup> Will there never be an end of all our ceaseless talk about the delay of the Parousia? How can the coming of that which doth not enter in ever be delayed? The End of which the New Testament speaks is no temporal event. . . . What delays its coming is not the Parousia, but our awakening.

—Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans

<sup>vi</sup> So what can I do?

I scratched out this answer one day:

I can watch "me" die.

Every good decision (Faith, hope and love in me) is watching my old man die...

And every good decision in me is watching my New Man rise from the dead.

So I can watch "me" die, and I can watch "me" live.

I can observe my own creation and be eternally grateful for who I am.

I can be humbled and exalted.

I can love because I am loved.

I can choose the Good in freedom for the Good has chosen me.

I can do nothing... and everything... who Am I?

Well, I guess..."It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for me."

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vii The best explanation of Revelation 20:1-15 must be the words of Jesus in John 5:21-29. Read them slowly and think it through. Isn't this what John is describing as he watches the judgment at the great white throne?

*<sup>21</sup> For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. <sup>22</sup> For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever 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.*

*<sup>25</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup> And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.—John 5:21-29*