

Great Things for Yourself

Jeremiah 45

January 17, 2021

Peter Hiett

Video and audio versions available online:

<https://www.tsdowntown.com/sermons/great-things-for-yourself/>

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

[Offertory song: "Who You Say I Am" by Hillsong Worship]

Prayer

And so Lord God, I pray that you would help us this morning to preach. I'm a child of God...yes, I am. Amen.

Message

Video clip: *The Man I Am*
Schick Hydro 5 Sense TV Commercial, 2018

Scene begins with a skinny teenager in thick glasses, Kevin, shaving in the mirror without a shirt, revealing his less-than-buff physique.

Kevin In a short time, you decided what kind of man I am. You stuck a label on me. (Faces camera) But that's not for you to decide.

Scene changes to a viral video of Kevin hip-hop dancing impressively in his high school cafeteria. Screen then reverts back to Kevin shaving in his bathroom.

Kevin This is the man I am.

Kevin begins dancing across the bathroom floor.

We all imagine great things for ourselves. And our economy runs on that fact. "Imagine great things for yourself, and then our product will help you achieve that great thing." *Imagine great things for yourself...* And he imagines a dance move. Now, it is a cool dance move; I just doubt that it is who he really is and that the Shick Hydro Sense razor was necessary for him to become the man who he is.

We all imagine great things for ourselves and seek those things. But recently, great things for ourselves have been harder and harder to imagine, and definitely become harder and harder to seek.

If you're like me, you've gotten older... and every year, the great things you imagined for yourself seem harder and harder to attain. But that's been especially true in the last year, for since April the economy has utterly tanked, close to 400,000 people have died in just the US, and there are more

troops patrolling the streets of Washington DC than all of those in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria combined.

But yet ever since April, I've been feasting my soul on a text that I find deeply encouraging, and I'd like to share it with you today: It's Jeremiah 45.

You may remember that Jeremiah prophesied to Judah for over fifty years, beginning in the reign of Good King Josiah and continuing through the fall of Jerusalem, under the reign of Josiah's not-so-good sons. During that time, Jeremiah prophesied immense destruction and an outrageous hope, not only for Judah but all the nations. He prophesied, he suffered immensely, and he had a secretary named Baruch who wrote down all that Jeremiah prophesied for at least 22 years of his ministry—he wrote it down... twice.

Remember in those days, there were no typewriters or computers; he writes everything on papyrus or vellum. And almost everyone hates what he writes...and he probably does too, for he prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem, which is his home.

In chapter 36, as the scroll was read to bad King Jehoiakim, after each section had been read, the king would cut it off and throw it into the fire. And then the King ordered that Jeremiah and Baruch be seized, but they escape. And at that, God tells Jeremiah and Baruch to do it all again—write it all down again—and sprinkle in a few added words of woe for the king...

Well, through Jeremiah, God speaks to Judah, Egypt, Babylon, and all the nations, but in Chapter 45 he speaks to Baruch, and I think also... to me.

45 The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the dictation of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: ² “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: ³ You said, ‘Woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain. I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.’ ⁴ Thus shall you say to him, [that is: “Baruch, I command you to preach this to yourself.”] Thus says the Lord: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up—that is, the whole land [*eretz*—also translated “earth”]. ⁵ And do you seek great things for yourself?

Well, we all seek great things for ourselves, don't we? Our economy runs on the assumption that we imagine and seek great things for ourselves...and also the truth that we aren't very good at discerning what those “great things” actually are: a soft drink, a car, public accolades, or a Schick Hydro Sense Razor.

When my son Coleman was about two, I asked him one day, “Coleman, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

He said, “A backhoe.”

I said, “Do you mean that you want to *drive* a backhoe?”

He said, “No! I want to *be* a backhoe!”

“When you wish upon a star,

*Makes no difference who you are.
Anything your heart desires,
Will come to you."*

It used to make me really nervous when my kids would sing that... *Imagine* if he turned into a backhoe. Imagine if anything his two-year-old heart desired came to him... That would be a tragedy.

When I was about seven, I joined the Indian Guides. And in Indian Guides, you had to wear a loin cloth over your shorts, supposedly like an Indian brave. And it had a little butt-flap that covered your behind. I remember being embarrassed that my "butt-flap" poked out too far. (On other kids, it would drop straight down, but mine went out, and then down). As a kid, I had a real complex about this, and it stayed with me a long time.

In the 60's and early 70's, I used to make my mom buy me really tight striped pants to make my bottom look smaller, and then those pants kept ripping out in the seat. In college, I was ashamed that my behind looked like a bubble; my roommate called me "bubble butt." For years I dreamed, I imagined, that my butt was smaller.

Then one day after I turned fifty, my wife looked at me and said, "You have no butt! What happened to your butt?"

I looked... and she was right, it had disappeared— which means that at some point, perhaps only for a few seconds in the middle of the night, along about 2011, my behind was perfect... and I totally missed it!

Recently, I've been going to the doctor with hip problems, and last week he told me, "Your problem is... you lost your butt."

Well, I'm just pointing out that like every little kid, we all imagine great things for ourselves, and yet we don't know what great things are. We imagine great things for ourselves, seek great things for ourselves, and when we get those great things for ourselves, we discover that they're not all that great.

There was a time when I imagined that tying my shoe would make everything great...and it was great for a few hours.

Then I imagined: "If I could ride a bike, it would make everything great," and it was great... for a few hours.

Then I imagined: "If only I had a locker like the kids in junior high, everything would be great," and it was great for a day.

Then I imagined: "If only I graduated, everything would be great," but it wasn't all that great, for then I needed to find a job.

Then I imagined: "If only I could get a job as a pastor, and the church would grow, and people would think I was cool."

Then I imagined that we could build a big, new building.

Then I imagined that I could author some books.

Then I *got* all of those things...and felt like I was trapped and utterly exhausted by all of those things...

Then I *lost* all of those things...

...And *then* in the middle of the night, somewhere along about 2011—my butt disappeared! ...And now I really miss it. (Seriously, it hurts and it's causing problems—I really miss it!)

I'm just saying: We imagine great things for ourselves, seek great things for ourselves, and then when we get those great things for ourselves, we find that they're not all that great, and we're downright miserable.

When I seek great things for myself, I often find myself incredibly anxious, driven, insecure, and alone. If I seek to preach a great sermon—for myself—I get incredibly stressed about myself, and I even start to hope that Chris, Karl, and Andrew don't preach great sermons—because I'm seeking great things for myself, and comparing myself to Chris, Karl, and Andrew.

I'm anxious, driven, insecure, and alone when I seek great things for myself—even if those things are themselves actually great.

Is righteousness great? Yeah.

But when I seek it for myself, might I become self-righteous?

Is Jesus great? Yeah.

You know the Pharisees wanted him for themselves—that's why they took his life on the tree in that garden... they were jealous. They didn't want to be *with* Jesus; they wanted to possess Jesus for themselves.

Is Salvation great? Yeah.

So why did Jesus say: "Whoever would save his soul will lose it"? Do you seek salvation for yourself?ⁱ

In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis does a beautiful job of depicting hades, that is "hell"; it's a place where everyone gets whatever they want—big houses, nice butts, Schick razors, and all the cool dance moves they could ever desire. Everyone gets what they want, but no one has the capacity to want what they get, especially themselves; each self is thoroughly anxious and entirely alone. They don't dance together, and if they dance, they dance alone.

Jeremiah 45:4 ...**Thus says the Lord: Behold, what I have built** [like, Jerusalem] **I am breaking down, and what I have planted** [like Israel] **I am plucking up—that is, the whole land** [earth]. ⁵ **And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster** [*rah*] **upon all flesh, declares the Lord.**

"All flesh"—not "*some* flesh;" not "Republican flesh, and not Democrat flesh," or "Moslem flesh" and not "Christian flesh," or "Gay flesh" and not "Straight flesh," or "Chris, Andrew and Karl's flesh" and not "Peter's flesh." "*All* flesh." *You're all gonna get wasted together*—that's the judgment on all flesh.

What is "flesh" (*basar* in Hebrew, and *sarx* in Greek)? "Flesh" is flesh, meat; you can just reach out and slap it.

So, what's the problem with flesh? (People seem to assume that it's sex, which is ironic since the very first command in the Bible is to basically have sex—"be fruitful and multiply.")

It seems to me that the biblical problem with “flesh” is not that it’s what we would call physical, but that it’s entirely self-centered... *except* during sacred moments of communion in the sacrament of the covenant of marriage, when two bodies of flesh are united making one body—even new life, which we call a baby.

So the problem with my flesh is not that it’s physical, but that it only feels its own pleasure and its pain... and so it seeks great things for itself, but not great things for its neighbor; it is alone. We’re each trapped alone in a body of flesh... and it’s “not good that the *Adam* is alone.”

My flesh sees the Good and consumes the Good and the Life... and finds itself alone. My flesh eats life and poops death to be quite accurate.

But in Scripture, “flesh” often refers to more than physical flesh; it’s often emotional and psychic flesh—what I think we usually call the *ego*. The flesh is that “self” that “seeks great things” for itself.

“I’m bringing disaster on all flesh,” declares the Lord. ...And maybe that’s not such a bad thing.

Whenever you feel insecure, anxious, arrogant, or alone, ask yourself: “Self, are you seeking great things for yourself?”
And I bet you are.

The Lord says: “Stop it; I’m bringing disaster on all flesh.”

The word translated “disaster” is usually translated “evil.” That’s fascinating, for if the desires of the flesh are evil, and God brings evil upon that evil, then evil is self-annihilating. And even though evil is not what God wills, the fact that you suffer some evil has a purpose.

So maybe...the purpose of suffering *some evil* is to annihilate *all evil* and liberate the Good. And maybe the Good is *to know the Good and love the Good in freedom*... well, that’s a big topic.

But here’s something rather interesting about the word “flesh” in the Bible: it’s often a euphemism for a man’s foreskin which covers his penis. This freaks out modern, promiscuous prudes like us, but the idea in circumcision is that the foreskin (flesh) is cut away for the sake of an intimate communion that manifests love and produces life... and is experienced as joy. It’s a picture of something else, according to Scripture.

You know, when people throw a party, they often say, “*Let’s get wasted!*” What is it that they want to have “wasted” so that they can party? Isn’t it their flesh, that is, their ego? They want to lose themselves, so they can find themselves actually loving someone else, actually communing with someone else at the party.

Scripture says, “Don’t get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery—it only tears things down. Don’t get wasted with wine, for that is dissolution; but be filled with the Spirit.”ⁱⁱ

It’s fascinating to me that in the Old Testament, the judgment of God is pictured as a cup that sinners are forced to drink until drunk.ⁱⁱⁱ It destroys the ego, and so looks like shame, and yet it creates something new, because there’s something amazing that’s in the cup? Wine that is blood, and blood contains the life, that is the Spirit—and that river of blood brings a body together, making the whole body live.

“I’m bringing disaster on all flesh declares the Lord.”

That sounds terrifying and painful, and I imagine that it is, but it may also be what “I,” trapped within this body of flesh and ego, most deeply desire—the judgment of God: “Peter, Andrew, Karl, and Chri—you are all gonna get wasted together. Forget about yourselves and enjoy each other because you enjoy me—I am the Spirit that is Love and now courses through your veins, for y’all are my body, you’re one body. And my judgment, my command is *life*—eternal life.” (John 12:50. Go read it!)

- In Genesis 6:13, God determines to make “an end to all flesh,” but he appears to botch the job, because he allows Noah and his family to escape on a boat.
- The Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah over and over prophecy the destruction of not *some* flesh... but *all* flesh.
- In Romans 8, Paul writes that in Jesus, God condemned sin in the flesh.
(I think it at least means that a true encounter with Jesus will destroy your ego.)
- In 2 Corinthians, he writes: “The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for *all*, therefore *all have died*.”

I think that means that rather than seeking the destruction of my own flesh—which would be seeking a “great thing,” and therefore *not* a “great thing—I can simply remember Jesus, and thereby remember that all flesh has already been destroyed. So, I don’t have to try and destroy my own flesh; I just need to remember it’s been destroyed—My flesh, my *ego*, is an illusion. Then I can forget myself and begin to enjoy my friends...and the party.

One day, I’ll actually be able to taste the pizza that Andrew Trawick eats, and neither of us will feel any pain, for pain is what a body feels when it’s torn apart.

“One has died for all,” writes Paul, “therefore all have died; and he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

All have died, all flesh suffers disaster, but that’s not the end of the story...

Well, to Baruch, God says: **“Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the Lord. But I will give [literally: “have given” (perfect tense)] you your life [nephesh] as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.”**

One popular paraphrase translates this as God saying: “Things are going to get worse before they get better. But don’t worry. I’ll keep you alive through the whole business.”^{iv}

Never read a paraphrase before you read an accurate, literal translation. What the Lord *actually* says is so much better than what our flesh is prone to assume.^v He actually says: “*I have given you your nephesh in all places—in every place—to which you may go.*” That means that even as Baruch experiences disaster in his flesh, he’ll be receiving his *nephesh* in every place he happens to go.

It’s astounding, for it sounds like this *nephesh* already exists. And God has given this *nephesh* to Baruch, yet Baruch will be discovering this *nephesh*... in every place he happens to go.

And what is a *nephesh*? Well, your *nephesh* is that thing that God creates on the Sixth Day of Creation in the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 2:7, the Lord God took some dust of the *adamah* (the ground) and breathed the breath of *hayim*, (that's life). ^{vi} He breathed *the Life* into the dust and Adam became a living *nephesh*... a "soul." It's a word that doesn't have a great equivalent in English, so it's usually translated "soul," but it's also translated "life..." and that's confusing because Jesus is "*the Life*," as in the one and only life—In Scripture that's the word *zoe* in Greek and *hayim* in Hebrew.

Jesus is the *zoe*, and that *zoe*, that life, is "*indestructible*" according to Scripture^{vii}—it's eternal.

But Jesus also had a soul, that is a *nephesh* or *psyche*, (in Greek). And he said, *you must lose your soul... to find it*. In fact, "*he poured out his soul*"^{viii} on Mt. Zion and died; the *nephesh* died, not the indestructible *zoe*. Actually, I think it formed a river.

A person's *nephesh*, or soul, is like a container or vessel for the Life.

So, what is the worth of every person?

Well, every person contains the Breath of God, and must be worth of the Breath, which is the Life, which is in fact, Jesus—you are literally worth Jesus.

And yet, like Andrew preached three weeks ago, every person has an individual value—some sing well, some don't sing well; some should teach, some shouldn't teach; some are tall, some are short, all are different.

I loved Andrew's message but didn't get a chance to discuss this with him...I think the worth of your life—your *Zoe*—is infinite, and indestructible, for it's literally Christ in you, the Life, in you. And your unique value is like the shape of his Life in you; that is, it's his blood in you, which conforms to the shape of your earthen vessel.

As Andrew preached, I kept thinking of these:



We're like one of these... one piece of a jigsaw puzzle.



If you found one of these lying on the floor while you were vacuuming, what would you do with it? Well, that would entirely depend on what you thought it was, right? If you weren't aware that it was a piece to a puzzle, or thought that there was no puzzle, you'd throw it away—you'd think it worthless.



However, if you knew it was a part of a puzzle, particularly one you had been working on for a long time—you'd treat it like a treasure.

[Image of the single puzzle piece previously shown appears on screen.]

So, what is each and every piece of a jigsaw puzzle worth?

Well, each piece is worth the same exact amount, and that's the entire puzzle. And yet no two pieces are exactly alike; they each have an irreplaceable and individual value.

Understand? I think this is what you are, "already created in Christ Jesus for Good works which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in them."^{ix}

John wrote, "Beloved, we are God's children now (see that means you have the same infinite worth to God; each of my children is worth everything to me), and what we will be has yet to appear (maybe that's a little like our unique and individual value. It appears over time.)"^x

Whatever the case, you cannot create your worth, and you cannot create your value—which I think is like the shape of your worth.

You can't create your value, *but* you can discover your value... and become valuable to the people around you in very practical ways.

But finding your value and making yourself valuable to others is a very counterintuitive process for the children of Adam. And that's because we've listened to a snake, and we keep imagining "great things for ourselves" because we don't believe that we already are the great thing that God has already imagined.

In other words, if this puzzle piece is you, and you are unaware that you are an indispensable part of the great thing that has already been imagined... and so, you are unaware of your infinite and unique worth, that is your individual value.... You will seek great things for yourself, hide your own value, and render yourself rather worthless to your neighbors.

How so?

Well, if this puzzle piece is you, and a snake whispered to you, "Hey, you're not so great. You ought to seek some great things... for yourself," ...



...well, you might look at your neighbor, judge yourself, and think “Gosh, I have an empty space on top and my neighbor has no empty space on top, so I better fill in that empty space on top.”

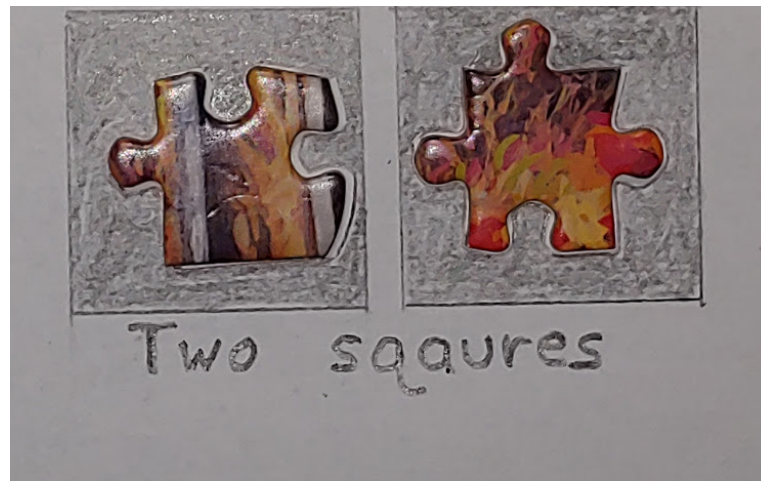


And maybe your neighbor would look at you, judge himself, and say, “Gosh, I have a thing that sticks out on top, and he doesn’t have a thing that sticks out on top, so I better cut that thing off... or at least, cover it up.”

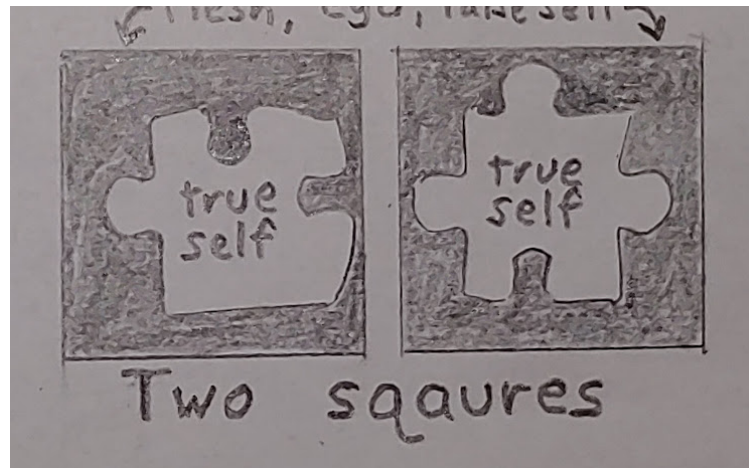


In elementary school, Coleman won a national award in math, and he covered it up because he was seeking great things for himself, and none of his football buddies thought a math trophy was a “great thing.”

Well anyway, if this is what you are, and a snake convinced you that there is no big picture that gives you value, so maybe you ought to make yourself valuable by seeking great things for yourself.... over time, I think this is what you'd become:



One of these squares, or maybe they'd be circles, but they'd all be the same, boring, and unable to connect. This is what everyone would become, or maybe, we have become.



See? I think the puzzle piece is like your *true self* that God has created—it has infinite worth, and unique value, that cannot be destroyed. It cannot be destroyed, but it can be hidden in fig leaves, or buried in a body of flesh, a vessel of clay in the depths of space and time.

Your true self can be buried in your false self, your ego, your flesh.

So, how do you find yourself?

Well, you have to lose yourself... to find yourself.

But how can I lose myself by trying?

If losing myself is a great thing, then seeking that “great thing” is not so great.

How do I lose myself without getting stuck on myself?

This is the interior monologue of at least half of the parties that Peter Hiett attends:

OK, Peter, stop thinking about yourself... you know the way you start a sentence and don't have the words to finish the sentence..., But then you don't start a sentence until too late because you've tried to think it all the way through the sentence in your head. Then you say it, and it's no longer funny. And what you said just now wasn't funny; it was creepy... And oh crap—she's been talking this whole time, and you don't know what the hell she's saying!

See, in order to *be* myself, I have to *lose* myself.

- When I worry about myself, I cannot be myself.
- In order to be myself, I have to lose myself.
- And in order to lose myself, I have to focus on something other than myself, preferably greater than myself.
- And if I'm a puzzle piece, maybe that would be the finished puzzle, or perhaps the One that made it in the first place.

“He who saves his soul will lose it,” says Jesus, “but he who loses his soul for my sake and the gospel—” (see, maybe that’s the big picture: Jesus and the good news of His Kingdom)—“will find it. For what does it profit a man to gain the world and forfeit his soul.”

You see, saving your own soul is like taking a puzzle piece, wrapping it in bubble wrap and all the insulation this world has to offer, and then keeping it in a box.

My mom used to love to work on jigsaw puzzles, and when I was little, she’d let me help. She’d hand me a piece and say, “This is your piece— why don’t you work on this piece?”

Imagine if I held on to that piece and said, “Wow, this is my piece?! I’ll wrap it in bubble wrap and keep it in a box. I’m not going to lose it, or give it away! Thanks, Mom!”

She’d say, “No, Peter; it’s no fun unless you give it away. This is a puzzle, and when it’s altogether, it makes a beautiful picture. Your piece is worth the whole puzzle, but it’s no fun until you discover how it fits and then give it away. You lose it and find it in the puzzle—get the picture?”

Sometimes people say things like, “Well, if you’re already great, why would you worry about doing great things? Why do great things if you aren’t seeking great things for yourself?”

You see, that’s like asking, “Why would you tell stories at a party? Or begin to sing or dance— dancing is a lot of work and it can be painful... Why would you tell stories, sing, dance, and laugh at jokes unless you were seeking great things for yourself?”

Well, if someone asked you that, wouldn’t you look at them with compassion and think, “Oh, I’m so sorry for you; you never understood; it’s fun.”

“You must have been practicing your dance steps, in order to make yourself great, and so you never enjoyed dancing and always danced alone.”

“You were seeking the party for yourself, and so never joined the party.”

“It’s fun to lose yourself in a song and find yourself dancing.”

“It’s fun to lose yourself in a story and find yourself laughing.”

“It’s fun to lose yourself in a party and discover that you’re not alone.”

“It’s even fun to lose yourself in love and find yourself supporting a wife and four kids... even though it’s hard, and sometimes quite painful.”

Scripture says that Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before him...”^{xi} ... I think that’s us: his Kingdom, his body, his bride.

Well, my mom would hand me a puzzle piece, and when I’d get discouraged, she’d say, “Don’t give up; it’s got to fit somewhere, Peter. So, try different things; put it in all sorts of different places, and don’t get discouraged. The harder it is to find its place, the more fun it will be when that place is found.”

Sometimes she’d give me the last (the eschatos!) piece. And when I’d give it away, I’d discover it’s meaning... and the meaning of all things. “*It’s a horse!*” I would discover it’s meaning and the meaning of the entire puzzle! “*It’s a picture of a farm!*” And I would love the picture that we had constructed together so much more than the one printed on the box—I was blessed.

Well, that’s just an analogy: You are not a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. ...But you are a living stone in an eternal city named Jerusalem. And you are a member in the body of Christ. And in every moment of your space and time, God is giving you your soul. Nothing is wasted.^{xii}

Where you’ve missed your soul in your past, you will still find it with forgiveness. Where you’ve yet to see it, you anticipate it with hope. And right now, you realize this blessing by faith,^{xiii} that’s losing yourself for Christ and finding yourself in Christ, moment by moment, like Abraham.

“One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself,” wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, shortly before he was sent to the prison camp in Nazi Germany. “Whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman..., a righteous man, or an unrighteous one. By living unreservedly in life’s duties, problems, successes, and failures, experiences, and perplexities. In so doing, we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world... That, I think, is faith that is repentance, that is how one becomes a man and a Christian.” (cf Jer. 45!) ^{xiv}

You can’t obtain the blessing, that is your own soul, by seeking great things for yourself.
You obtain the blessing by believing that *you are* the great thing that God has sought.

And he’s not only “sought you,” he’s *fought* for you and suffered for you, and that’s the greatest thing... And it will fill all things; it’s the love of God, the Life of Christ, the Blood of the covenant, God’s Breath in every moment of your space and time.

He says, “Baruch, I will give you your *nephesh*, your life, your soul, as a prize of war in all places, every place, that you may go.”

Do you know that God in Christ Jesus *fought* for you, and *you are* his *prize*?

Jesus is the essence of all great things, and each of us sought him for ourselves. And so, we took his life on the tree in the garden. And there, he gave his life on the tree in the garden. There he *fought* for you, and now he *gives* himself to you in “all places that you may go.”

Wow! When you see that, it destroys your flesh and gives birth to Faith, the person that you truly are. He literally creates you with his body broken and blood shed, and he gives you yourself in every moment of your space and time... but not as you seek great things for yourself, but as your self gives great things away.^{xv} That’s how you are born from above.

So of course, Jesus says, “It’s more blessed to give than receive.” He thinks it’s great to give himself away... It’s blessed.

You know what “Baruch” means in Hebrew? It’s the passive participle of Barak. It is actually the Hebrew word “Blessed.” And “Nariah” means: “glistening light of Yahweh.”

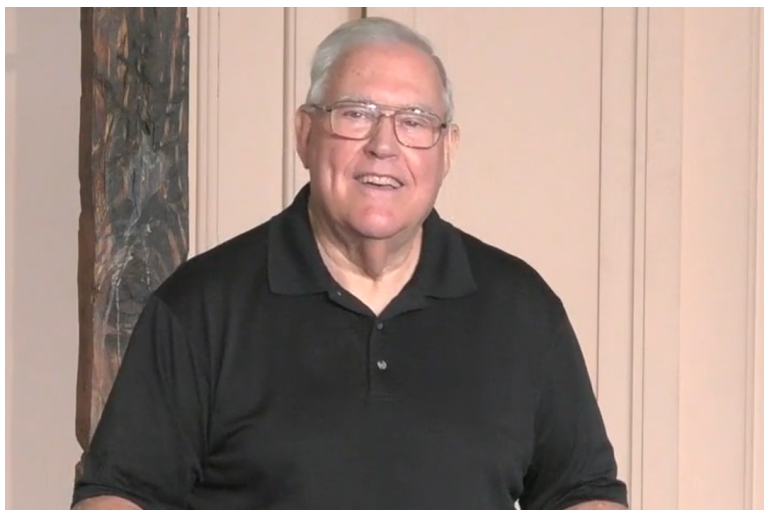
So literally, God says: “Baruch son of Nariah—Blessed son of the glittering light of God... do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing evil on all flesh, (that’s the thing that covers the light) declares the Lord. But I have given you your soul as a prize of war in all places which you may go.”

I think he’s saying: “Blessed son of my glittering light, don’t seek great things for yourself. You are the great thing that I have sought and am revealing in all the moments of your space and time.”

“I’ve given you your soul that you might lose it and find it in me—*our* soul, a communion of life, the last piece of the puzzle....”

It’s like St. Paul wrote:

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Behold old things have passed away and all things have become new.”^{xvi}



You know, Jim May passed away on Monday morning. I’m really, really going to miss him; he reminded me of my dad.

Both of them were pastors that had achieved great things for themselves. And yet both of them went through some very painful times when they had to let all of those great things go... But they kept preaching, singing, telling stories, and laughing with everyone they'd meet: In their 80s, they were so happy; they were blessed (baruch).

I think of Jim or I think of my dad, and I think: "that's Jesus." Neither of them was perfect, but in them, I encountered Jesus.

I think that's because they had stopped imagining great things for themselves. And so, they could simply be the great things that God had imagined. And they could discover the great things that God had imagined all around them. And that's pretty great. That's Heaven.^{xvii}

Communion

And so, at a tree in a garden, on Mt. Moriah, that was also Mt. Calvary, and Mt. Zion, at the edge of time and eternity, he *fought* for you: He took bread and he broke it, saying, "*This is my body given to you.*" And he took the cup saying, "*This is the covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins; drink of it all of you.*"

It was Jeremiah who prophesied and Baruch that wrote it down:

Jeremiah 31:33 · "For this is the covenant that I will make with them...
'I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts...they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest...For I will forgive their iniquity and remember their
sin no more."

At this table, we confess the self that we have imagined. And we receive the self that God has imagined. What God imagines is called "reality" and "the kingdom of Heaven."

We invite you to come take communion, and imagine great things for everyone. And in particular, God. Amen?

BENEDICTION

Now how do you feel? Blessed? Maybe that's because for a few minutes you stopped imagining great things for yourself... and you just imagined Great Things..

That's called Worship. It's supposed to be the motivation for everything you do. It kills your false self, liberates your new self, and you begin to enjoy who you truly are and what everything actually is.

There is no way that you could imagine a better you than the one that God has already imagined.

So, maybe you should stop imagining great things for yourself...so, you can be the Great Thing that God has imagined.

You really are “his masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that you should walk in them.”

Believe the gospel.
Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life [*psyche*: soul] will lose it, but whoever loses his life [*psyche*: soul] for my sake will save it.
²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? —Luke 9:23-25

ⁱⁱ Ephesians 5:18

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah 5:17-22; Psalm 60:3, 75:8; Jeremiah 25:15-17; Ezekiel 23:31-34

^{iv} This is from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson. I hope you never read a paraphrase before you read a more literal translation like the ESV, RSV, NRSV, NKJV, or KJV. A paraphrase is simply someone trying to make sense of what the text says, and so it’s entirely limited by the “translators” (actually paraphrasers) imagination. And so, they actively eliminate paradox and mystery and reduce the text to that which seems “reasonable” to them. Paraphrases can be helpful if you’re diligent to remember what they are.

^v Many commentators assume he’s saying the same thing—“Don’t stress, I’ll keep you alive Baruch... “ in hell, cause that’s where Baruch thinks he is.
“Don’t worry Baruch, I’m destroying all flesh, but not your flesh—you get to keep it.” That makes no sense.

^{vi} “*The Spirit is life*,” says the Scripture. Romans 8:10

^{vii} Hebrews 7:16

^{viii} Isaiah 53:12

ix For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
- Ephesians 2:8-10

x 1 John 3:10

xi Hebrews 12:2

xii Paula D'Arcy puts it, "God comes to us disguised as our life." Everything belongs; God uses everything. There are no dead-ends. There is no wasted energy. Everything is recycled. Sin history and salvation history are two sides of one coin. I believe with all my heart that the Gospel is all about the mystery of forgiveness. When you "get" forgiveness, you get it. We use the phrase "falling in love." I think forgiveness is almost the same thing. It's a mystery we fall into: the mystery is God. God forgives all things for being imperfect, broken, and poor.
- Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, p. 130

xiii If a man believes and knows God, he can no longer ask, What is the meaning of my life? But by believing he actually lives the meaning of his life, the meaning of his creatureliness, of his individuality, in the limits of his creatureliness and individuality and in the fallibility of his existence, in the sin in which he is involved and of which daily and hourly he is guilty; yet he also lives it with the aid which is daily and hourly imparted to him through God's interceding for him, in spite of him, and without him deserving it.
- Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press LTD., 1949), p. 26

xiv "One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type), a righteous man, or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By... living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia* (repentance); and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer. 45!). How can success make us arrogant, or failure lead us astray, when we share in God's sufferings through a life of this kind?"
--Dietrich Bonhoeffer quoted in Eric Mataxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville: 2010) p. 484 [written the day he discovered the plot to kill Hitler had failed and he would be implicated]

xv This is astounding, but it's never too late to give him a moment...

He is the one who makes all things new and enjoys doing it.

I think this means that until you surrender a moment, you really haven't lived that moment. I suspect we each have a gazillion moments that we haven't yet lived. Old moments can be transformed and lived through forgiveness—forgiveness is giving great things away (*aphiemi* in Greek. Also translated "let.") It's letting things go.

We all get stuck in a moment, or many moments and the Grace of God in Christ Jesus has the power to transform all those moments.

xvi 2nd Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

xvii I think they had stopped seeking great things for themselves...

And started to believe that we all are the great things that Jesus sought.