

Behold The
Bridegroom

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- PROLOGUE -

These pages are written primarily to the saints, to the body of Christian believers worldwide, to help prepare us for the soon coming of our heavenly bridegroom.

The bible is God's love letter to us. The Lord is always truthful, and we, by the Holy Spirit, must balance the many encouragements and warnings contained therein. We cannot add to, nor take away from its contents, and I believe that the bible is the best commentary on itself. We cannot try to fit our preconceived beliefs into what we read, and by some spiritual contortion try to make it all stick together. No, let us be true and honest, and simply say: "what saith my Lord unto his servant,"⁽¹⁾ and, be like the Bereans who, "searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so."⁽²⁾

The bible texts are taken from the King James or Authorised translation. I had originally hoped to either paraphrase the scriptures, or include them in the body of the text, in order to make it more readable. However, the sheer volume of scripture prevented this, and therefore I have often simply given the bible reference throughout. I was nearly going to apologise for this, but really I think it is for the better. It is better for the reader to take the time to look up the bible references.

Therefore I encourage you, dear reader, to read the word of God yourself, and let the Holy Spirit minister directly to your own heart. And when he does, please share whatever he has shown you with your fellow believers, and with the writer, that we all might be edified together. As Paul said, "for we know in part, and we prophesy in part."⁽³⁾

It was never my intention to write a novel or to merely entertain, but I do trust this book is readable, and a blessing to those who read.

“But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”⁽⁴⁾

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophesy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”⁽⁵⁾

References:

- (1) Joshua 5:14 (2) Acts 17:11 (3) 1 Corinthians 13:9
(4) Matthew 13:16 (5) Revelation 1:3

- Chapter 1 -

I WILL COME AGAIN ⁽¹⁾

Let us, at the outset of this book, introduce the bridegroom and the bride, especially for the benefit of young believers.

The bridegroom is our Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist, when speaking of Jesus, said, “he that hath the bride is the bridegroom”, ⁽²⁾ and spoke of himself as the “friend of the bridegroom....rejoicing greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice”. ⁽³⁾ When speaking of leaving his disciples, Jesus said, “the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them”. ⁽⁴⁾

The church is called to be the bride of Christ. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus concerning a man and woman being joined in marriage saying, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” ⁽⁵⁾ The church is to be joined, or married to Christ, to take his name, and, in this union, to be fruitful.

The Lord Jesus Christ has come to search for and woo his bride, has suffered cruelly on the cross to redeem and rescue his bride, and has given gifts to perfect and beautify his bride.

When we have a bride and bridegroom, well, we all expect a wedding to take place. And this is exactly so. The day and hour has been set by the bridegroom’s Father, and this is still the day of his espousals. They are not yet husband and wife. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”. ⁽⁶⁾

So the wedding day has been set, though we know not the date, and those who are already part of the bride are calling others to be included: “The Spirit and the bride say Come. And let him that heareth say, Come”. (7)

The Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly bridegroom, is coming again to this earth for his bride. He said so: “I will come again”. (8) The angels said so: “this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”, (9) and there are literally hundreds of scriptures, both old and new testaments, referring to the second coming of Christ.

This then, has been the hope and longing of every true saint for two thousand years since his death and resurrection. It is what we declare every time we break bread in remembrance of him. We do it only “till he come”. (10) It was the great longing of our Lord in that upper room when he said, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom”. (11) It has also been the great longing of God the Father for a much longer time. When we read through the Old Testament, we often come across the phrase “in the day of the Lord” or “In that day,” which is God’s constant focus. No matter what the present situation he is dealing with concerning Israel, he always looks beyond to “that day”. In Zechariah we read: “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives”, (12) and again: “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one”. (13) And “that day” is not far off.

The return of Jesus Christ to this earth, to put down all rebellion and lawlessness, to reign in peace and righteousness, and to abolish death, is no mere tack onto the gospel. It is an essential element of the good news of his death, burial and resurrection. Whether we fall asleep in Christ or are alive at his coming, it is the great hope and longing to be with him when He returns. In

fact our redemption remains incomplete until these mortal bodies of clay are redeemed at that time, as Paul writes: “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”.⁽¹⁴⁾

The hope of the Lord’s coming again held a prominent place in Paul’s teaching and preaching. We see him writing to the young church at Thessalonica reminding them, “How ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead.”⁽¹⁵⁾ All included in the same message – turning to God, serving God, waiting for his Son.

But I find quite often when the message is on the subject of Christ’s return, either an air of intellectual curiosity pervades or, on the other hand, a kind of carnival atmosphere. We certainly need to read carefully the many scriptures given to us, but we should not think that it is by our much learning and studying many books that we can reason it out. It is only by the Holy Spirit revealing to us the things of Christ that we can truly understand. As Jesus said to Peter: “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”⁽¹⁶⁾ And we cannot force the Lord to reveal things to us. Sometimes it requires patience, and we need to be like Mary who “kept all these things” and “pondered them in her heart”.⁽¹⁷⁾ She did not have full understanding at the time, of the tidings that the shepherds brought, but as she kept and pondered them in her heart, bit by bit understanding came. As we meditate in his word, bit by bit the Lord gives us understanding and we rejoice when he does, as Jesus did when he said “I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes”.⁽¹⁸⁾

And whilst there certainly is excitement at the prospect of his near return, it surely must be tempered by a soberness at the rapid descent into spiritual darkness and depravity of this world prior to our Lord's return, and the awesome scale of God's righteous judgments poured out upon such a world.

The prophet Malachi declared that, "the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth?" ⁽¹⁹⁾ Similarly John in the Revelation spoke "For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" ⁽²⁰⁾

The Lord's coming as a babe in Bethlehem, his virgin birth, his life, ministry, death and resurrection were all foretold in numerous passages of scripture and fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ. We can relate to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who were also reasoning together, whose sorrow and dejection was turned into joy, as Jesus himself, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself". ⁽²¹⁾ They were sad because of unbelief, but when the Lord opened the scriptures to them, their hearts were tender, and he could reveal himself unto them, and their hearts burned within them. Contrast this to the group of Pharisees in Matthew 2:4-6 who knew the scriptures, who were able to advise Herod that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem, from Micah 5:2, but who could not recognize the Christ when he came, and argued with Nicodemus and told him to, "search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." ⁽²²⁾ They had the scriptures right but they were so wrong!

It seems to be only a few who were ready for the Christ when he first came. Ones like Simeon and Anna serving the Lord in the temple, the shepherds watching over their flocks, the ones who

were willing to repent at the preaching of John the Baptist. Not many. Then what about the Lord's people today? How many will be ready for the Lord's coming again?

This book, then, has been written with a twofold purpose. Firstly that all of God's children will see their high, holy, and heavenly calling, that they will press towards the prize, that they will apprehend all that God has apprehended them for, that they might sing with Hannah, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory". ⁽²³⁾ Secondly, as a warning trumpet to the proud and careless amongst his people.

References:

- (1) John 14:3 (2) John 3:29 (3) John 3:29 (4) Mathew 9:15
- (5) Ephesians 5:32 (6) 2 Corinthians 11:2 (7) Revelation 22:17
- (8) John 14:3 (9) Acts 1:11 (10) 1 Corinthians 11:26
- (11) Matthew 26:29 (12) Zechariah 14:4 (13) Zechariah 14:9
- (14) Romans 8:22 & 23 (15) 1 Thessalonians 1:9 & 10
- (16) Matthew 16:17 (17) Luke 2:19 (18) Matthew 11:25
- (19) Malachi 3: 1 & 2 (20) Revelation 6:17 (21) Luke 24:27
- (22) John 7: 41-52 (23) 1 Samuel 2:8

- Chapter 2 -

LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE
YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS
OF THE EARTH. ⁽¹⁾

I think there is a very great danger of Christians looking into the subject of Christ's return in isolation from the rest of scripture, and almost in isolation from Christ himself, in a kind of abstract or intellectual form. It doesn't work that way. We cannot look to our heavenly bridegroom if we haven't first fallen in love with him, if we haven't beheld him in all his wondrous ways. We cannot just switch our minds to behold his coming if we haven't first learnt to behold him in everything we do in our daily lives. Paul put it quite simply to the Galatians: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." ⁽²⁾ Christ who is our life! Is Christ my life?

The whole bible points us to a person, God's Son, Jesus Christ. Paul knew the bible but did not know the Lord. It was only when he came to know the Lord did the scriptures really open up to him, because the author in the form of the Holy Spirit was now inside him. Jesus once challenged a group of religious men: "search the scriptures; for in them ye think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." ⁽³⁾

So that is the issue here - life. Do you have eternal life? Not just think you have, or hope you have, but are 100% sure you have, according to his unfailing word. Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus, tells them: “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins”.⁽⁴⁾ The verb ‘to have’ is present tense. He does not say they will have redemption, but they have (now) redemption. And he does not say they might have. No, they have it and they know they have it, and rejoice in that knowledge.

We can only have life by looking away from self and looking to, or beholding our Lord Jesus Christ.

Firstly, we are told to: “Behold your God”.⁽⁵⁾ It is always good for us to remember our creator, in whose hand our breath is, to know that we are but dust, that we have been fearfully and wonderfully made, that “it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture”.⁽⁶⁾ It keeps things in proper perspective. It keeps us in that humility of mind that we can say with David, “when I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him?”⁽⁷⁾ It is good for us to remember that this mighty and everlasting God has revealed himself to us in the person of His son, Jesus Christ, “who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”⁽⁸⁾ We can then fall afresh at his feet and proclaim like Thomas, “My Lord and my God”.⁽⁹⁾

Secondly, we are told to: “Behold the man”.⁽¹⁰⁾ Jesus is the perfect man, the last Adam, the man about whom God the Father could say “this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”⁽¹¹⁾ When we read through the gospel narratives, we are

continually struck by his absolute devotion to the will of his Father, to defer to him in all things, to honour him, to do always those things that please him, and as he said: “that the world may know that I love the Father.”⁽¹²⁾ “He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”.⁽¹³⁾ He is a greater than Solomon or Jonah, a greater than Moses or Elijah. He is not a disappointment; we can find no fault in him. “Never man spake like this man.”⁽¹⁴⁾ “His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely.”⁽¹⁵⁾

Thirdly, we are told to: “Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world”.⁽¹⁶⁾ This perfect man, this Son of God, became our perfect saviour when he offered himself as that spotless passover lamb on the cross of Calvary. He died for the sins of the whole world. My sins, and your sins. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, and imputing not their trespasses unto them “. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Our sins had to be paid for and dealt with at the cross. Oh the blessedness to know his forgiveness, full and free. To be delivered from the guilt and shame of sin. To be delivered from the awful wages of sin, which is death, and to be delivered from the slavery to sin. And so, our fellowship with the Father and Son is only on the basis of life and light; that “as we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin”⁽¹⁸⁾

Fourthly, we are told to: “Behold the man whose name is the branch”,⁽¹⁹⁾ teaching us that all God’s purposes from eternity are bound up in his Son. That Christ didn’t just come out of nowhere, in a sort of vacuum, but was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies; that he was God’s anointed King, the son of David according to the flesh.⁽²⁰⁾ In Isaiah we read, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, (David’s father),

and a Branch shall grow out of his roots,”⁽²¹⁾ and the angel Gabriel when appearing to Mary said “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord shall give him the throne of his father David:”⁽²²⁾

Fifthly, we are told to: “Behold the stone that I have laid”,⁽²³⁾ and Peter takes this up in his first epistle: “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore it is also contained in the scripture, Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.”⁽²⁴⁾

When Jesus Christ becomes our Saviour and Lord, we also begin to experience some of his rejection and sorrow, and the world’s indifference and hatred. And that only makes us love him more. Not only him, but all his dear people whoever and wherever they may be. We are part of a large and wonderful family of whom Christ is the head. We are to be built up alongside our brothers and sisters, with Christ as the foundation of all that I do, to be his house or his church.⁽²⁵⁾ We learn to recognize the gifts in our brothers and sisters, to function together, to submit one to another, to pray one for another, and to serve one another. In this way we are built up together a spiritual house and as a priesthood of believers resting on him.

Sadly, many Christians remain spiritual babes, often bound by earthly traditions and customs, and never being able to take their proper share in the building of God’s spiritual house. Jesus said: “I

will build my church”.⁽²⁶⁾ It is his church, and we must follow the plan he has given in his word to be his effective co-workers.

Sixthly, we are told to: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth”.⁽²⁷⁾ We learn that he is the servant King. He is the one who washed his disciples’ feet, he is the meek and lowly one, and he is the one who said: “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”⁽²⁸⁾ It is perhaps more difficult for us in western society to understand the mind of a servant (or bond slave). Naturally, we neither like to serve or be served. It’s ‘serve yourself.’ I remember when I first came to know the Lord, I felt decidedly uncomfortable when other saints came to serve me. It is something we have to learn, this serving and allowing the saints to serve us in return. Paul wrote to the church in Galatia: “By love serve one another “.⁽²⁹⁾

A servant (or a bond slave) has no rights, no set hours of service, no set wage, and no retirement age. Yet the happiest saints are those who have learnt to serve.

Seventhly, and last of all, we are told to: “Behold the bridegroom”.⁽³⁰⁾ As we earlier saw, our Lord Jesus Christ is our heavenly bridegroom. We have fallen in love with him. None can be compared to him. He it is who has sought us and bought us, and he says to us: “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee”.⁽³¹⁾

Marriage between a man and a woman should be the most intimate of all relationships. They are to be joined together, spirit, soul, and body. They are one flesh. They are to share everything as one, and should no longer live independent lives. Husbands are told to love their wives as their own selves. Wives are told to

reverence their husbands and submit to them. Unfortunately, we all too often see the breakdown of even Christian marriages. Husbands begin to love their jobs, or their sport, or simply themselves before their wives. Wives forget the order given by God, and think that their husbands have been given to them as a ‘help meet’, rather than the other way round, and begin to want to rule their husbands. And so the enemy gets a foothold.

But the relationship between Christ and his church, his bride, shall have no such ‘spots or wrinkles’. He is our heavenly lover, our provider, our source of strength and comfort, and he is utterly faithful.

And as we behold him we become like him, as those living creatures in Revelation around the throne in heaven ⁽³²⁾ – one as a lion (the king), the next as a calf (the servant), the next as a man (the Son of man) and the fourth as an eagle (the Lord from heaven). And John did just that- he beheld. “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts (living creatures), and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” ⁽³³⁾

The Lamb is mentioned twenty eight times in the book of Revelation, teaching us that by constantly beholding the Lord Jesus we can overcome all of Satan’s devices against us. He is reigning in the midst of the throne. He is surrounded by worship. He has the seven horns, or the fullness of power in heaven and in earth, ⁽³⁴⁾ and the seven eyes, or the fullness of the Spirit. ⁽³⁵⁾

We begin to realise now that this so great salvation is not just one way. It is far beyond just an escape out of hell and a ticket into heaven (though it includes that). It is not just enjoying all his many blessings (though it includes that too). We begin to realise that, chiefly this so great salvation is for the Lord himself: “thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were

created". (36) Instead of being self centered in everything, and focusing on getting from the Lord, we begin to realise that, by faith and ever looking to him, we can bring joy and satisfaction to his heart. That, then, is perfect rest and freedom.

So, as we behold the Lord Jesus as our creator, as the perfect man, as the Lamb of God, as the anointed King, as the rejected stone, and as the humble servant, we are prepared to behold him as our heavenly bridegroom. I think only then can we begin to look at the promises of his coming.

References:

- (1) Isaiah 45:22 (2) Colossians 3:4 (3) John 5:39 & 40
- (4) Ephesians 1:7 (5) Isaiah 40:9 (6) Psalm 100:3
- (7) Psalm 8:3 & 4 (8) Philippians 2:6 & 7 (9) John 20:28
- (10) John 19:5 (11) Matthew 3:17 (12) John 14:31
- (13) Hebrews 4:15 (14) John 7:40 (15) Song Of Songs 5:16
- (16) John 1:29 (17) 2 Corinthians 5:19 (18) 1 John 1:7
- (19) Zechariah 6:12 (20) Jeremiah 33:15 (21) Isaiah 11:1
- (22) Luke 1:31 & 32 (23) Zechariah 3:9 (24) 1 Peter 2:4-6
- (25) 1 Timothy 3:15 (26) Matthew 16:18 (27) Isaiah 42:1
- (28) Matthew 20:27 & 28 (29) Galatians 5:13
- (30) Matthew 25:6 (31) Jeremiah 31:3 (32) Revelation 4:7
- (33) Revelation 5:6 (34) Matthew 28:18
- (35) See Isaiah 11:2 for the seven fold working of the Spirit of God. (36) Revelation 4:11

THE GREAT GOD HATH
MADE KNOWN WHAT
SHALL COME TO PASS
HEREAFTER. ⁽¹⁾

It would be good at this time to give a broad overview of the seven principal future events relating to the Lord's coming and his reign. This will serve to give an historical time line and perspective for our main subject – the Lord coming for his bride. So the seven principal events can be summarised, as follows:

1. The Lord's judgment upon this earth for seven years
2. The Lord coming for his bride
3. The Lord married to his bride
4. The Lord coming with his bride
5. The Lord reigning with his bride
6. The Lord's final judgment of Satan and this earth
7. The Lord reigning with his bride on the new earth throughout the eternal ages.

The first event is the seven years of great tribulation on the earth because of man's sin and rebellion against God increasing to such an extent that they finally receive the man of sin (called the

antichrist or the beast) to rule over them. This is the man who will be the full embodiment of Satan. Just as Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh (the mystery of Godliness),⁽²⁾ so the antichrist will be Satan manifest in the flesh (the mystery of iniquity).⁽³⁾

The Jewish nation will receive him as their long awaited Messiah (or Christ) as Jesus told them they would: “I am come in my Father’s name and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive”,⁽⁴⁾ and the nations of the world shall worship him. They will be deceived by his oratory and lies,⁽⁵⁾ by the wonders and miracles he performs,⁽⁶⁾ and by their own love of sin and unrighteousness.⁽⁷⁾

This seven year period, which is the seventieth week spoken of in Daniel’s revelation,⁽⁸⁾ is detailed for us in Revelation chapters six through to nineteen. It is spoken of by Jesus to his disciples as a time of “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be”.⁽⁹⁾

It is a time when over half the world’s people will perish through wars, famines, plagues and the beasts of the earth.⁽¹⁰⁾ In Matthew chapter twenty four, Jesus compares the lead up to this time with the days of Noah when, “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”,⁽¹¹⁾ and God judged the earth then with a great flood destroying every man, woman and child except for the eight souls in the ark (Noah and his family).

Peter in his second epistle warns us of scoffers coming in the last days skeptical of the Lord’s promise to return, and who are willingly ignorant, (they don’t want to know,) that God has already judged the earth once through a flood.⁽¹²⁾

In all this, God still maintains his one focus: establishing his Son upon his throne in Jerusalem. He declared this in Psalm 2: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed....Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion”.⁽¹³⁾ To do this he will overturn this earth and the king that has usurped his throne. “And thou, profane wicked Prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end.....I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he comes whose right it is; and I will give it him”.⁽¹⁴⁾

The second event is the Lord coming for his bride (sometimes called the ‘rapture’). We find this in various scriptures but principally 1 Cor. 15:50-52 and 1 Thess. 4:13-18 where we see the Lord coming to the air together with the saints that have gone before, and the saints, which are alive at the time, being caught up with new resurrection bodies to meet them. And then that glorious sure hope proclaimed “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”⁽¹⁵⁾ It is this second event that we will look at more closely in the following chapters.

The third event is the marriage of the Lamb to his bride, the Church. This we see in Revelation chapter nineteen verses seven to nine. Little is said about it in scripture, but one can only wonder and imagine at the glory and beauty of such an event with all of heaven invited. The Lord has married his spotless bride, who has made herself ready, whom he has loved and cleansed and finally presented to himself a glorious Church. A bride that will be perfectly one with, and submitted to, her heavenly husband for all eternity.

The fourth event to take place is the Lord's return to the earth with his bride. He is not coming this time to be despised and rejected, but is coming as King of kings and Lord of lords, with power and great glory, to judge and make war, to put all enemies under his feet, and to establish his kingdom on this earth. He comes with His church at the end of the seven year tribulation period, "with ten thousands of his saints,"⁽¹⁶⁾ to defeat the armies of the nations who have come up to Jerusalem.

This is what we read of in Revelation as "The battle of that great day of God Almighty",⁽¹⁷⁾ and the terrible aftermath as the "supper of the great God".⁽¹⁸⁾ The armies of the nations come up to Armageddon (or the valley of Megiddo, North West of Jerusalem),⁽¹⁹⁾ in their final assault against Jerusalem in the "valley of Jehoshaphat".⁽²⁰⁾ Two thirds of Israel are killed and the remaining third turn to the Lord with great mourning, as God's Spirit convicts and reveals to them the true Messiah, Jesus, that they had rejected.⁽²¹⁾

The Lord roars like a lion out of Zion,⁽²²⁾ causes them to turn upon each other,⁽²³⁾ rains down great hailstorms, fire and brimstone,⁽²⁴⁾ and "the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth".⁽²⁵⁾ The earth is subdued and the beast and his false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire.

The fifth event is the Lord establishing his kingdom on this earth for one thousand years with his saints, reigning from Jerusalem. This is what was uppermost in the minds of the disciples, "because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear",⁽²⁶⁾ and still they persisted with their question after his resurrection. "They asked him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"⁽²⁷⁾ This is the glorious kingdom all their prophets had foretold, of the

period that Isaiah had foreseen: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this”.⁽²⁸⁾ The descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not realise what a length of time that would need to elapse between the fulfillment of both these two verses.

Satan will be bound for this time,⁽²⁹⁾ the temple and the Land of Israel will be cleansed from idolatry and the aftermath of battle,⁽³⁰⁾ and the nations that remain on the earth will be judged according to their treatment of God’s children before.⁽³¹⁾ The Lord Jesus Christ will reign from Jerusalem over all the earth.⁽³²⁾ David will reign over Israel,⁽³³⁾ and the twelve apostles of the Lamb shall reign over the twelve tribes of Israel.⁽³⁴⁾ And all his faithful servants shall reign over different cities and regions of the earth.⁽³⁵⁾

That which has alluded mankind for thousands of years, that which is inscribed upon the walls of the United Nations building in New York from Micah chapter four verse three, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore,” shall finally be a reality. A kingdom of peace, because the Prince of Peace is reigning. Not only will men be at peace, but even the animals will be at peace.⁽³⁶⁾ The Word of God will go out from Jerusalem to the whole earth,⁽³⁷⁾ and the nations shall come up to worship the Lord.⁽³⁸⁾ No wonder Isaiah exclaimed “and his rest shall be glorious.”⁽³⁹⁾

The sixth event is the final judgment on Satan, the destruction of this world and the universe, and the second resurrection when everyone who has ever lived will stand before the throne of God to be judged.

Rebellion is deep in the heart of man. We see it in our children against the proper authority of parents (as we also rebelled against ours), and that seed planted in the heart by Satan of first, ingratitude, then resentment and murmuring, and finally leading to open rebellion. After one thousand years of long life, peace and great blessing, and being taught the Word of God and the ways of God, the nations again rise up in rebellion against Jesus Christ and his church. Satan is loosed and deceives them, convincing them that they are not ‘free’, that they are under ‘tyranny,’ just as he lied to Eve in the garden. They come up to attack the camp of the saints and Jerusalem, and God destroys them with fire from heaven, and casts Satan and his legion of rebellious angels into the lake of fire. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Man will not destroy this earth. God will. It will not be an excess of fluro carbons into the air, but an excess of sin and rebellion that will bring about the destruction of this earth. Just as God spoke to create the heavens and the earth, so he will just speak again to burn them up. “But the heavens and the earth, which are by the same word, kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment, and perdition of ungodly men.” ⁽⁴¹⁾

Then the rest of the dead will hear the command of the Son of God to come forth to be judged. ⁽⁴²⁾ They may have said whilst alive “we will not have this man to reign over us”, ⁽⁴³⁾ but on that day there will be no choice. On that day every knee shall bow to Jesus Christ, then “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

It is said that William Booth told his troops that he wished they could spend just five minutes in hell and then send them out

to pray and preach with such fervor and passion for the lost. Paul said “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!” ⁽⁴⁵⁾ May the Lord fill us with the fire of the Holy Spirit and love for the lost and go labour in his harvest.

The seventh and last event is the creation of the new heaven and earth and the reign of Jesus Christ with his bride throughout the endless ages. Just as the Lord spoke to create the first heaven and earth, and spoke again to destroy them, so he will again just speak to create the new heaven and new earth. We will not have to wait millions of years for them to evolve.

As we read the last ten chapters of the prophet Isaiah (as he moves in and out of his present time, the reign of Christ on this earth, and the new heavens and new earth) and the last two chapters of the bible, we get a glimpse into the eternal kingdom. We see elements of Eden restored before the fall: the river of life, the tree of life, no more curse. But it goes far beyond that. This last Adam is our glorious Saviour and King, and his bride has the glory of God, adorned for her husband. “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” ⁽⁴⁶⁾

The Lord gives us enough to whet our appetites. He is full of surprises. In Isaiah we read, “For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, besides you, what he has prepared for those that wait for him”, ⁽⁴⁷⁾ and Paul adds “Neither has it entered the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him”. ⁽⁴⁸⁾ Isaiah say’s “wait for him”. Paul says “love him”. When we put the two together we get a beautiful thought. If I love the Lord, I will surely wait for him.

Like the beloved bridegroom in the Song of Songs, the Lord is ever moving forward, and I’m sure it will take all eternity to

come to know the unsearchable riches of Christ. “His servants shall serve him, and they shall reign forever and ever.”⁽⁴⁹⁾

References:

- (1) Daniel 2:45 (2) 1 Timothy 3:16 (3) 2 Thessalonians 2:7
- (4) John 5:43 (5) Daniel 7:8 & Revelation 13:6
- (6) Revelation 13:13 & 14 (7) 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12
- (8) Daniel 9:24-27 (9) Matthew 24:21 (10) Ezekiel 14:21 & Revelation 6:8 (11) Genesis 6:5 (12) 2 Peter 3:5 & 6
- (13) Psalm 2:2 & 6 (14) Ezekiel 21:25 & 27
- (15) 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (16) Jude 14 (17) Revelation 16:14
- (18) Revelation 19:17 (19) see Zechariah 12:11 & 2 Chronicles 35:22 (20) Joel 3:12 (21) see Zechariah Chpts. 12 & 13 (22) Joel 3:16 (23) Ezekiel 38:21, Zechariah 14:13 & read the story of an earlier battle in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30
- (24) Ezekiel 38:22 (25) Revelation 19:11-21 (26) Luke 19:11
- (27) Acts 1:6 (28) Isaiah 9:6 & 7 (29) Revelation 20:1 & 2
- (30) Ezekiel 39:11 16 (31) Matthew 25:31-46
- (32) Zechariah 6:13 & 14:9
- (33) Jeremiah 30:9 & Ezekiel 34:23 & 24 (34) Matthew 19:28
- (35) Luke 19:12-19 (36) Isaiah 11:6-9 (37) Isaiah 2:2 & 3
- (38) Zechariah 14:16-19 (39) Isaiah 11:10
- (40) Revelation 20:7-11 (41) 2 Peter 3:7 (42) Revelation 20:5 & John 5:27-29 (43) Luke 19:14 (44) Revelation 20:15
- (45) 1 Corinthians 9:16 (46) Isaiah 62:5 (47) Isaiah 64:4
- (48) 1 Corinthians 2:9 (49) Revelation 22:3 & 5

WHEN SHALL THESE
THINGS BE? AND WHAT
SHALL BE THE SIGN OF
THY COMING? ⁽¹⁾

This was of course the disciple's question to Jesus when he told them of the coming destruction of Herod's temple. It is also our question now. The Lord told them clearly, "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." ⁽²⁾ It is a very closely guarded secret. Before that, though, the Lord gave them signs to watch out for, to indicate when that day and hour is approaching. It is these signs that we now want to focus our attention on. I have listed seven, and, as we see each of them coming to the fore in our time, we understand 'that day' is fast approaching.

The first sign is an historical one, for which we need to go to the book of Daniel to understand where we are in the history of the world. But just before we do that, it is good to note, in passing, that the history of man upon this earth, from the creation of Adam up to the present day (2011) is approximately six thousand years. It is not millions of years of evolving from lower primates. That is the devil's lie. If you cannot just believe as a little child that

God spoke and created the heavens and earth, and the various different life forms of vegetation, fish, birds, and animals, and created man uniquely in his own image, I cannot see how you can believe the rest- the resurrection of Jesus, his return to this earth, and the creation of a new heaven and earth. As Jesus asked Nicodemus “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (3)

The Lord revealed to Daniel whilst in captivity in Babylon, that the future history of the world (in relation to his Son and his consistent focus to, “set my King upon my holy hill of Zion”)(4) would be dominated by four successive kingdoms – Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. These were represented in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel chapter two as a great image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes, part of iron and part of clay. Later these kingdoms were again revealed to Daniel in chapter seven as beasts, and we know that they have come and gone, just as the Lord told Daniel.

But the fourth kingdom, the Roman kingdom, shall be revived in the end time, depicted by the feet and toes, part of iron, part of clay. These toes correspond to the ten horns of the dreadful beast. And these ‘ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall arise after them.... And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High.’ (5) This is the antichrist. This is the “wicked profane prince” that shall come to confirm a covenant with Israel at the beginning the seven years of great tribulation. (6) This antichrist will arise out of this revived Roman Empire.

This is what we are seeing today in the formation of the European Union, starting with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, encompassing Western Europe (broadly the same countries

included in the old Western Roman Empire at its height) and expanding now to encompass most of Europe.

Now, it is necessary here to digress a little and have a very brief history lesson on the fall of the Roman Empire. We need to do this in order to understand what it really means for us to see its revival in these last days, and to understand what is the spiritual power behind the temporal (political/economic/military) power.

Christianity had spread to all parts of the Roman Empire, though the Christians themselves were cruelly persecuted. As the might of Rome was waning, there were attacks from without and also civil wars within as rivals for the throne battled each other for supremacy.

In AD 312 a Roman general, Constantine, did battle with a rival general called Maxentius. Before the battle, Constantine was meant to have had a vision of the cross in the heavens and, the words ‘in this sign conquer.’ He then had all his troops display this sign on their shields, and subsequently won the battle and became Emperor. He also became a ‘Christian’. But only one outwardly, not a “new creature”, as we see in the bible. He issued his Edict of Toleration in AD 313 and proclaimed his version of Christianity as the official religion of the empire. But it was really only the old pagan gods and ceremonies taken originally from Babylon, and dressed up with ‘Christian’ trappings to make it acceptable and popular. (7)

After Constantine moved his headquarters in AD330 to Byzantium (later called Constantinople, and today called Istanbul), Rome was in turmoil, and the Roman bishops of this false church gained much of the power and elected one of their own to rule as Pope. The old political and military office of Caesar had become the office of the Pope, and even retained the old title: ‘Pontifus Maximus’. As the old Caesars were worshipped

as God on earth, so were the popes as God's representatives on earth and later declared to be infallible.

By the time of Charlemagne, the then reigning pope, Hadrian 1, produced a document called the 'Donations of Constantine' in around AD 790, which claimed that Constantine had made the Roman church, headed by the then Pope Sylvester 1, heir to most of the Roman Empire. Charlemagne was crowned Emperor in AD 800 by the then Pope Leo 111, and established his 'Holy Roman Empire' over much of Europe, with the Roman Church pulling the strings behind the scenes.

This apostate Roman church then ruled over the peoples of Europe and their expanding empires through fear and deceit. Through their false teaching of papal succession, transubstantiation in the mass, purgatory, the confessional and priestly forgiveness and indulgences, the rulers and the people of Europe were held in superstition and darkness. It alone is responsible for the torture and death of millions of martyrs of Jesus throughout these times with their inquisitions.

It has always been an organization of political intrigue and continues to be so today. In 1933 the Vatican signed concordats with Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, the three Nazi or Fascist dictators in Germany, Italy and Spain, protecting the Roman church and enabling these dictators to launch their attacks on neighbouring countries, bringing about the Second World War.

The Roman church is the state church of so many countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Poland and most of South America. With its massive wealth, it is the richest single organization in the world today. It is the 'great whore' and 'Mystery Babylon' of Revelation chapters seventeen and eighteen, clearly identified as such in verses nine and eighteen of chapter seventeen. Rome is the city built on seven hills, and, at that time, was the undisputed ruler "over the kings of the earth." It is the

spiritual power and driving force behind the creation of the EU, the revival of the old Roman Empire.

Around the miter worn by the Pope is inscribed the Latin words ‘VICARIVS FILII DEI’ which translated means: ‘in the place of the Son of God.’ This in itself is blasphemous enough to denote this apostate church as antichrist. But when we further translate these words into the equivalent Roman numerals we find they add up to 666, ^(a) the sign given in Revelation thirteen, verse eighteen for the false prophet which causes the world to worship the beast or the antichrist.

Now, I feel I must write a few words especially to any reader who may be in this system and not realise it. Jesus said it is a mystery. It is not apparent. Outwardly professing to be Christian but denying the salvation and authority of Christ and his word. No priest can forgive your sins, for all have sinned. Only Jesus Christ can forgive your sins. No man can take the place of Christ on earth, as the Pope purports to do. Jesus Christ is the living head of his own church. There is no ‘Queen of heaven’, only the King of Kings. And Jesus pleads with you to “come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of plagues”. ⁽⁸⁾

So the revival of the old Roman kingdom, the increasing power of the Roman apostate church, and the rise of the antichrist are intertwined and concurrent. They must go together.

The second sign is the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1947 just after the end of the Second World War. This had been coming for some time but the war and the systematic murder of millions of Jewish people was the catalyst to finally bring it about. Without this taking place all the events we read in the bible of the end time would have no meaning.

Furthermore, Jesus said to his disciples (along with the other signs of his coming), "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves ye know that summer is nigh."⁽⁹⁾ In different places of the bible, the fig tree is used as a picture of Israel. In Jeremiah chapter twenty four the Lord compares those of Israel prepared to go into captivity as good figs, but those in rebellion as bad or rotten figs. And Jesus himself, in a parable in Luke chapter thirteen compares the nation of Israel to a barren fig tree.⁽¹⁰⁾ So when Jesus speaks here of the fig tree putting forth its leaves (after the long winter), he is referring to the rebirth of the nation of Israel after so long a time.

This had been foretold before by Israel's prophets. We read in Ezekiel, "And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the counties and will bring them to their own land,"⁽¹¹⁾ and again, "When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered.... Then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob."⁽¹²⁾ The scattering took place in AD70 when the Roman general Titus sacked Jerusalem, which was foretold to Daniel: "and the people of the Prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary".⁽¹³⁾ The ingathering has been happening mainly from the end of the First World War when Britain was given a mandate over Palestine, as it was then called, and gathered pace after 1947 when Israel was declared a separate nation.

Even the rebirth of the Hebrew language is a wonder after so long a time being only spoken by a few scholars. The Jews, having learnt the different languages of the lands to where they had been scattered, could not understand one another when they finally returned to the land of Israel. This also was foretold by one of their prophets. In Zephaniah we read, "for then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent."⁽¹⁴⁾

The rebirth of the nation of Israel was met with bitter opposition, and but for the Lord, could easily have been still born. The sentiment that prevailed in the neighboring Muslim countries is expressed in the words of the psalmist: “They have said, come, and let us cut them off from being a nation: that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent; they are confederate against thee.”⁽¹⁵⁾

In 1967 the ‘Six Day War’ saw Israel launch preemptive air strikes against the Muslim countries about, which were planning to attack them, and the aftermath of this war saw Israel extend its borders to include the ancient capital of Jerusalem. This is the city of David. This is where Solomon’s temple was built and where it will be rebuilt in the end time. It will be in this rebuilt temple that the the man of sin, the antichrist “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”⁽¹⁶⁾

So after nearly two thousand years, Israel has regained control over the temple site. We are told that the ‘Orthodox Jews’ have everything secretly ready to build and to equip this temple when finally they are given the green light. But of course there is a rather large obstacle in the way – a Moslem mosque called the Dome of the Rock, which is meant to be the second most holy site in Islam. The Moslem nations around about Israel are determined to regain control of this site, and Israel is equally determined to retain control. So, we have then a huge impasse. Yet we know that the temple will be rebuilt, and the antichrist will sit there. It is now only awaiting the covenant between Israel and the false Christ, to rebuild the temple and recommence the daily sacrifice as of old.

The third sign is the rapidly deteriorating moral and spiritual state of the world, compared by Jesus to the time just prior to the flood. This was a time when men were filled with violence toward each other and when “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”⁽¹⁷⁾ And it was a time when the Lord’s people generally lost their separation from the world, just as we see happening today.

Paul warned Timothy that “In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.”⁽¹⁸⁾ What a list! As the bible goes out of our schools, our homes and our governments, so we see the increase of each and every one of these despicable traits in our society. As the television becomes more and more filled with violence, pornography, and the occult, we see a corresponding obsession with these things in our societies, and the consequent huge and tragic loss in, particularly, young lives.

The fourth sign, I believe, leads on from this: “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”⁽¹⁹⁾

Nations are simply made up of people, and these people are increasingly ‘proud, trucebreakers, fierce, and traitors.’ So no wonder we are seeing an increase in wars, violent revolution and civil strife. These are the beginnings of God’s judgments, the beginning of sorrows; the Lord taking peace from the earth.⁽²⁰⁾

The word ‘sorrows’ here is really the Greek word ‘odin’ which literally means birth pangs. So these are the pangs or pains the earth will be experiencing to give birth to the new nation of Israel, at first, and then the glorious kingdom of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. And like birth pangs they will increase in frequency and severity until birth.

Famines and pestilences are on the increase, with droughts, plagues of locusts etc., and all forms of diseases. Even with all the advances in technology, medical science, and chemical pesticides, the problem just gets bigger. The spread of AIDS like wildfire around the world with millions dying each year is a further tragic consequence of sin. As Paul wrote in Romans: “When they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful..... wherefore God gave them up to uncleanness.....unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.” (21)

I live in a city, Sydney, which has just staged it’s annual ‘Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival’ where homosexuals parade their perversions without shame or fear. They do not want to retain God in their knowledge, or forget that God has already judged Sodom where that same sin was rampant.⁽²²⁾ And so God’s judgment of AIDS.

The increase of earthquakes in the last fifty years has been well documented, and together with the earthquakes, often come the devastating tsunamis which Jesus spoke of saying: “the sea and the waves roaring.” ⁽²³⁾ During the writing of this chapter, there has been a major earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand. Soon after, another in Japan and the accompanying tsunami, with

tragic loss of life. There were scenes of devastation, panic, fear, and bitter sorrow. Some will tell us this is all due to climate change and global warming because of our industrial pollution, and land clearing, and so we must do all we can to stop the emission of ‘greenhouse’ gases.^(b) This is another of Satan’s lies to hide the real issue of man’s pollution – his sin and rebellion against his creator and the creator of this earth.

We certainly are called to be good stewards of God’s earth, and to “keep the garden”; ⁽²⁴⁾ to nurture this beautiful environment around us. But it is God that is shaking this earth. He is crying out: “O earth, earth, earth hear the word of the Lord.”⁽²⁵⁾ Not only is the ‘green movement’ reaching almost religious tones to ‘save our planet’, but is yet another push forward in the march towards one world government under the antichrist.

As Christians stand in the truth, live godly and separated lives, and declare these things without fear, they will be hated of all nations for his name’s sake. It is estimated that there have been more saints martyred for Jesus sake in the last century than all the preceding centuries together. And it will get worse. May the Lord fill us with his love for our fellow saints, follow our Master, and not be among those who will hate and betray one another.

The fifth sign will be the increase in false prophets, as Jesus said: “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many.....And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.”⁽²⁶⁾

Now what we have here goes beyond the deception whereby “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,” ⁽²⁷⁾ although at the very core it is essentially the same: “sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.” ⁽²⁸⁾

Christians are by no means immune from this deception. Paul wrote to the Hebrew believers to take heed,” lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (29) So the first thing we must take heed to is ourselves – our own heart, and guard our relationship with our Lord very closely, as we read in Proverbs: “keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”(30) We need to keep short accounts.

But I think principally this particular sign and warning from Jesus relates to deceivers and false prophets coming to the saints with the word of God. Already in the early church there were many false prophets and all the New Testament writers warned the saints of them. Paul called the elders of the church at Ephesus together and remonstrated with them saying: “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.” (31)

A little later John wrote to the saints: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (32)

Let me say now that there is no need for any of his people to be deceived. We have the word of truth and the spirit of truth, which Jesus said would guide us into all truth. But we need to take heed, and not be careless.

Now the very nature of deception is that it is not obvious, and would ordinarily contain an element of the truth, but in the end leads us away from the truth. Anything that breaks down the believer’s sanctification is error (doctrine of Balaam). (33)

Anything that seeks to divide the body and put a priestly class over the body of saints is error (doctrine of Nicolaitans).⁽³⁴⁾ Anything that denies the deity of Christ is error (Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Muslims). Anything that adds to the finished work of Christ on the cross as our full and complete sacrifice for sins is error (the Catholic mass, veneration of Mary, doctrine of purgatory). Anything that professes to be a new revelation or experience outside of the word of God is error (many Pentecostal groups teaching the baptism of the spirit as a separate experience from the new birth, the need to speak in tongues as proof of conversion, slain in the spirit etc.).

And so when we have the U.S. president, Barrack Obama, say in a speech in Germany before his election: “The walls between Christian and Muslim and Jew cannot stand,”⁽³⁵⁾ we know the deception is well advanced. How can the saints be one with those who deny that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Well, they may, and we may, but God will not, as Paul says in Timothy, “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”⁽³⁶⁾

The sixth sign is what we read of in Daniel: “.....the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”⁽³⁷⁾

Since the Second World War there has been an explosion of knowledge and travel, as the modes of transport have vastly improved and the relative cost has come right down so that even international air travel is now within the means of most in developed countries. A little before the war a trip to the moon was only talked about in comic books, and a few short years after it was a reality. There is a general feeling today that there is nothing, not even the far reaches of the universe, that cannot be attained by man with his new knowledge. That there is no sickness or disease

that cannot be cured by advances in medical science, and even death itself will be conquered. With ever increasingly powerful computers, man hopes to control the weather and his whole destiny. Nothing is beyond the realms of possibility. But from God's perspective it is rather: "Now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do." (38)

There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with gaining knowledge, or travel for that matter. God, I believe, has given us a spirit to discover new things, to explore, to gain a better appreciation of other lands and peoples. It should lead us to a humility of mind to discover the incredible complexity and variety of life that God has created. Our God is not a boring God. But instead, unfortunately it often fosters an arrogance of mind. You would think that man had established the laws of the universe himself, instead of just discovering what God has put into play.

And travel can be, and often is, a symptom of a restless and discontent spirit, described in airline advertising as the 'travel bug'. And knowledge can be, and often is, misused. The rapid advances in photography and computer micro processing will undoubtedly be used by the antichrist to control his subjects through camera surveillance, GPS tracking, and implanting a chip or a mark in order to buy and sell. There have been numerous books written on this subject which the reader can refer to, but it is sufficient here to note this as one of the signs of our Lord's soon return.

The seventh sign is the aligning of the world's economic and military strength with the battles and wars between the antichrist and the kings of the north, south, and east, as we read in Daniel chapters eleven and twelve, Revelation chapter sixteen, and Ezekiel chapter thirty eight.

This is not one of the signs that Jesus speaks of, and it is not so clear as yet (at least not to the writer), but nonetheless a ‘condition precedent’ for the tremendous battles that will come in both, the lead up to the antichrist seizing power, and during his reign.

In Daniel chapter eleven from verse six, where we are told that what follows is “in the end of years,” we see a series of intrigues and battles at first between the king of the south and the king of the north, and then the king of the north invades Israel. ⁽³⁹⁾ From verse twenty one, we see the rise of the antichrist (that vile person) taking power by subtlety and flatteries, and then further wars between him and the king of the south. Until, “at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him.” ⁽⁴⁰⁾ Then “tidings out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him,” ⁽⁴¹⁾ and we see in Revelation what these tidings are: the kings of the east with their armies coming against him. ⁽⁴²⁾ Until finally we read in Revelation, “the kings of the earth and of the whole world (are gathered) to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” ⁽⁴³⁾

Now, the point of looking at all this in the context of the signs of the Lord’s coming, is that it is only in very recent times (only after the Second World War, or since the rebirth of Israel) that we have seen a rapid rise in the economic power (and corresponding military power) of countries and regions to the north, south, and east of Israel, to challenge the long dominance of the west.

The Arab Muslim nations to the south have suddenly grown in significance due to the tremendous oil reserves they have, which the industrialized world badly needs. Their hatred for Israel is evidenced almost daily in our newspapers.

The rise of the Russian kingdom to the north after the war saw the onset of the ‘Cold War’. Though its wings have been clipped somewhat, it still remains a major power with a long

history of persecution against the Jewish people and recent wars with Muslim countries. In Ezekiel we see the northern armies being led by the 'Prince of Rosh'. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Finally the rise of the Asian powers to the east needs no elaborating. From the rise of Japan to challenge the west, to the new 'super power' of China as the western economies languish, we see a formidable economic and military power emerged.

And the West? (That mixture of iron and clay). And Israel? Well, they shall receive the antichrist.

So it is at the end of days, when Israel again has become a nation, that this generation is seeing all these signs being fulfilled. And so Jesus told his disciples (and through them, us), "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, (not just the fig tree) know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled". ⁽⁴⁵⁾ Notwithstanding any uncertainty as to what period of time actually represents a generation, (70 years?) the writer who was born in 1949 expects to see these things in his lifetime, if he is not called home first.

So what says our Lord to his saints? Well, firstly "take heed to yourselves" ⁽⁴⁶⁾ and "watch and pray always". ⁽⁴⁷⁾ Secondly, "look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh". ⁽⁴⁸⁾

References:

- (1) Matthew 24:3 (2) Matthew 24:36 (3) John 3:12
- (4) Psalm 2:6 (5) Daniel 7:24 & 25 (6) Ezekiel 21:25 & Daniel 9:26 & 27 (7) See 'The Two Babylons' by John Hislop
- (8) Revelation 18:4 (9) Matthew 24:32 (10) Luke 13:6-9
- (11) Ezekiel 34:13 (12) Ezekiel 28:25 (13) Daniel 9:26
- (14) Zephaniah 3:9 (15) Psalm 83:4 & 5
- (16) 2 Thessalonians 2:4 (17) Matthew 24:37-39 & Genesis 6:5
- (18) 2 Timothy 3:1-14 (19) Matthew 24:7-9 (20) Revelation 6:4
- (21) Romans 1:21-32 (22) Genesis Chapt. 18 & 19
- (23) Luke 21:25 (24) Genesis 2:15 (25) Jeremiah 22:29
- (26) Matthew 24:4-5 & 11 (27) 2 Corinthians 4:4
- (28) Romans 7:11 (29) Hebrews 3:12 & 13 (30) Proverbs 4:23
- (31) Acts 20:28-30 (32) 1 John 4:1 (33) Revelation 2:14
- (34) Revelation 2:15 (35) Berlin 24th July 2008
- (36) 2 Timothy 2:13 (37) Daniel 12:4 (38) Genesis 11:6
- (39) Daniel 11:16. See also Ezekiel Chapt. 38 where the armies out of the north, "*come up against my people of Israel*"
- (40) Daniel 11:40 (41) Daniel 11:44 (42) Revelation 16:12
- (43) Revelation 16:14 (44) Ezekiel 38:2 (Translated as 'chief prince' in the Authorised bible) (45) Matthew 24:33 & 34
- (46) Luke 21:34 (47) Luke 21:36 (48) Luke 21:28

Footnotes:

(a)	V	=	5
	I	=	1
	C	=	100
	A		
	R		
	I	=	1
	V	=	5
	S		
	F		
	I	=	1
	L	=	50
	I	=	1
	I	=	1
	D	=	500
	E		
	I	=	1

			666

(b) It was not too long ago that the body of the world's scientists were trying to convince us that we were on the precipice of the next 'ice age', as world sea temperatures had been steadily **declining** for some years! For those interested in this subject, please refer to an article entitled 'What's been happening to our Climate' in the November 1976 issue of the American 'National Geographic' magazine.

- Chapter 5 -

O DANIEL, A MAN
GREATLY BELOVED,
UNDERSTAND THE
WORDS THAT I SPEAK
UNTO THEE. ⁽¹⁾

Now what is our response when we read these things and see these things happening? Well, if we turn to the ninth chapter of Daniel we can see one man's response to what God had shown him, concerning the length of time God's people would be in captivity in Babylon.

Daniel had been reading his bible, and, as he read the prophesy of Jeremiah, he discovered that the Lord would bring judgment upon Israel and Jerusalem for seventy years. Then at the end of those seventy years: "I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." ⁽²⁾ Daniel knew that those seventy years were nearly up. What did he do? Ask for a bit more revelation? Let us be careful, saints of God, in what we ask for. We want more understanding, more revelation? Then we need to remember the words of our Lord Jesus, "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required". ⁽³⁾ The Lord requires a suitable response from us.

When Daniel understood that the seventy years were almost up, we read, “I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes”.⁽⁴⁾ There is a time for prayer and fasting. When Jesus was asked by some Pharisees why his disciples did not fast, he relied “can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”⁽⁵⁾ Our heavenly bridegroom is not with us in body and so his church needs to learn again how to fast and pray. How many assemblies of the Lord’s people today around the world have a full house on Sunday worship, but only a few to attend the prayer meeting? Then we as God’s children need to repent.

Daniel did not make excuses for his people, but fully confessed that they had sinned against the Lord, had rebelled against him, had not prayed to him, and had not obeyed his voice. Nor did he separate himself or excuse himself as he could have done. After all, the Lord himself grouped him together with Job and Noah as examples of righteous and upright lives.⁽⁶⁾ But he fully identified himself with the Lord’s people in their sin and rebellion and consequent punishment and, like Moses of old, pleaded with God for his great mercies sake, but also for the sake of the Lord himself.

Such an intercession enters right into the heart of God, is totally void of any self interest, and carries with it the weight of the Lord’s own purposes and heart’s desire for his people that are called by his name. No wonder Daniel was referred to as a man greatly beloved. Do we not also want to hear our Lord speak to us in such a manner? Then we need to confess our sins to the Lord and to one another, and fast and pray earnestly for the Lord’s people.

It is not just an interesting statistic that of the twenty seven verses in Daniel chapter nine, only the last four verses contain direct revelation from God, and the previous twenty odd verses recount Daniel's confession and intercession. I think the proportion is just about right. The Lord waits to see what we will do with what he has shown us before he will give us more. The psalmist says: "In thy light shall we see light", ⁽⁷⁾ and Abraham's servant testified: "I being in the way the Lord led me". ⁽⁸⁾ And Paul declares: "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." ⁽⁹⁾

So it is our attitude towards the Lord that is paramount. You might think I am labouring this point too much, but it is absolutely vital to have the right attitude. The Pharisees demanded to know "when the kingdom of God should come". ⁽¹⁰⁾ They demanded. The Lord later told these same men, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof". ⁽¹¹⁾

Now just see the attitude displayed by God's servants who have received great revelations. Look at Zechariah in chapter four when the angel shows to him the vision of the golden candlestick with the seven branches, and the two olive trees beside. Zechariah asks "what are these my Lord?" The angel replied "Knowest thou not what these be?" and Zechariah said "No my lord". ⁽¹²⁾ Or look at John on the isle of Patmos when the angel asked him, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?" John's simple response: "Sir thou knowest." ⁽¹³⁾ Or look at Daniel himself in chapter 10, upon seeing the visions and the angel talking with him, he said "For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? For as for me, straightway there remaineth no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me". ⁽¹⁴⁾ It is this childlike simplicity and straightway obedience that is so precious to the Lord. May we

always cultivate this attitude as we read God's word, and minister to his saints.

Now some may be thinking that it is just all too complex. All these scriptures and so many different opinions on the Lord's coming. Does it really matter when he comes, as long as I love and serve him? Well, that is a good point, and has some merit, and reminds me of a humorous story a dear brother told to me a few years back. It goes something like this:

There were three believers discussing the Lord's coming for his church (or the rapture), whether it would be pre tribulation, or mid or post tribulation and who is going to be raptured; all Christians or only some. Brothers A and B believed that only those Christians who are ready will be raptured, whilst brother C believed that all Christians will go. Suddenly there is a trumpet sound. In a twinkle of an eye brother C disappears into the sky. For a moment brothers A and B are shocked, but then they take courage, turn to each other, shake hands and say "we were right!"

Now the truth contained in this little story is obvious – it is better to be right with the Lord than to be right about the Lord's coming. Quite so. But there is a third alternative, which I think the Lord would have us pursue - to be right with him, and then to receive from him his mind concerning his coming. Daniel did. Gabriel came to him and said, "O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding,"⁽¹⁵⁾ and a little later, "he said unto me, O Daniel a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling."⁽¹⁶⁾

The point is, that the Lord wanted him to understand. If he did not, he would not have sent Gabriel to reveal these things unto him. And the Lord wants us to understand, and especially so seeing we find ourselves in "the kingdom of God, at such a time

as this.”⁽¹⁷⁾ And the Lord, I believe, is more willing to speak to us and show to us the things pertaining to himself and his kingdom, than we are to hear or receive. He waits till we are ready. As he said to his disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now”.⁽¹⁸⁾ So the Lord does want us to understand, and not only for ourselves individually, but for whatever part you and I are given to help prepare the Lord’s people for these days. As we read in Daniel, “And they that understand among the people shall instruct many.”⁽¹⁹⁾

So Daniel stood trembling. Yes, trembling. But he did stand. And the Lord wants us to do just that: “withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”⁽²⁰⁾

References:

- (1) Daniel 10:11
- (2) Jeremiah 29:10
- (3) Luke 12:48
- (4) Daniel 9:3
- (5) Matthew 9:15
- (6) Ezekiel 14:14
- (7) Psalm 36:9
- (8) Genesis 24:27
- (9) Acts 26:19
- (10) Luke 17:20
- (11) Matthew 21:43
- (12) Zechariah 4:5
- (13) Revelation 7:13 & 14
- (14) Daniel 10:17
- (15) Daniel 9:22 & 23
- (16) Daniel 10:11
- (17) Esther 4:14
- (18) John 16:12
- (19) Daniel 11:33
- (20) Ephesians 6:13

AND IN THE MIDST OF THE WEEK. ⁽¹⁾

We should pay attention, of course, to everything we read in the bible. We should pay extra attention when the Lord goes to the trouble to repeat himself. But when the Lord repeats the same thought numerous times then we should stand to attention and take the most earnest heed. This is precisely what we see the Lord doing when he clearly divides the seven year tribulation period, prior to his return to the earth in triumph, into two distinct halves of three and a half years each.

We read of these three and a half year periods expressed differently, as 'time, times, and half a time', ⁽²⁾ or '*forty two months*' ⁽³⁾ or "a thousand two hundred and threescore days". ⁽⁴⁾ All different ways of referring to the same period of time. Why should the Lord go to such lengths to focus our attention on the division of the seven years into two halves? What is the event that delineates the two halves, or what happens in the middle of the seven years? Well, when we read in Daniel: "and he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease", ⁽⁵⁾ we understand that this is precisely when the antichrist is revealed. And he will set up in the place of the daily sacrifice, "the abomination that maketh desolate."⁽⁶⁾ Remember, this seventieth week in Daniel corresponds to the last seven year period in Revelation."revealed for whatfor what he isn year period And it

is in the midst of this week, or in other words, when the first three and a half years are ended, that then the antichrist reveals his true colours.

But why then? What is the catalyst for this event? For the answer we need to turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter two. Paul is talking about the same period of time when the antichrist will sit in the temple in Jerusalem and be worshipped as God. But there is something restraining him or withholding him, or hindering ('let' in the old English of the Authorised Version) his full revelation. Something that is thwarting his full purposes until he be taken out of the way. What is that? It is the Church of God. The only thing that is preserving this world as 'the salt of the earth' is the presence of the Lord's people – his bride. When the Lord comes for his bride in the midst of the week, and takes her to himself, only then "shall that wicked (one) be revealed". ⁽⁷⁾ All restraint is gone. All opposition is silenced.

All of scripture is consistent. We may not always see it at first. But if we wait, the Lord shows us in his time. And so it is with the Lord coming for this church.

If we turn to Revelation chapter ten, we see the period spoken of is near to the end of the first three and a half years. The trumpets of God's judgments have been sounding, and the angel with the seventh or last trumpet is beginning to sound. And the angel swears, "that there should be time no longer". ⁽⁸⁾ This does not mean that we are entering some dream like period where time does not exist. There will always be time in that regard. No, it simply means 'time's up'. Time's up for what? Time's up for his church to be completed and taken up. This is the time when, "the mystery of God should be finished". ⁽⁹⁾

There are many mysteries in the bible, but there is one referred to as "a great mystery.... Christ and the Church." ⁽¹⁰⁾ That is the whole focus of the Lord. "I will build my church, and the gates of

hell shall not prevail against it”.⁽¹¹⁾ That is what he is doing, and, when he says it is complete, he will come for it. “And then that Wicked (one) shall be revealed”,⁽¹²⁾ and then, “woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”.⁽¹³⁾

And this was in the days of the voice of the seventh angel. Seven trumpets, and this it the seventh. Or in other words, the last trumpet. This is just what Paul tells the church at Corinth: “Behold I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed “. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Now you might be saying: ‘But this is not what I have heard. I have heard that the Lord comes for his church before the seven year tribulation period.’ Yes, I have often heard that proclaimed, but I cannot recall it ever being properly taught from the bible. It is just proclaimed and accepted. And it is easy to accept isn’t it? No suffering or tribulation. Just caught up.

To the best of my recollection there have been three areas of scripture taken in support of this position, of the Lord taking his church out before the seven year tribulation period. So, let us look closely and honestly at each of them.

Firstly, the distinction is made between the tribulations which all saints must go through, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, this period of time which is described as, “the great day of his wrath.”⁽¹⁵⁾ The question is asked: ‘the Lord would not pour out his wrath on his people, would he?’ And the Lord’s message to the church at Philadelphia is taken in support of this, “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation (testing) which shall come upon all the earth”.⁽¹⁶⁾

We must be very careful lest we fall into the same mistake that Peter and the other disciples often made: telling the Lord how he should respond, or what he should, or should not, do. This is always dangerous, and the Lord sharply rebuked Peter on one of those occasions saying, ‘thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.’⁽¹⁷⁾ We may not always understand what he is saying to us, but we should not presume that we know better. ‘He is not a tame lion’.⁽¹⁸⁾

This is not the eternal wrath of God in the fires of everlasting destruction, referred to as, “the wrath to come”,⁽¹⁹⁾ but this is God’s righteous anger upon a world in open rebellion against him. But still he wants his people here as a witness against the ungodly, and to testify to them that this is the hand of God. And still, “in his wrath he remembers mercy.”⁽²⁰⁾ He is God, not man. Still he is longing for man to repent. Still the gospel is to be preached.

The Lord has allowed in the past, great persecutions against his people. As Tertullian wrote in the second century: “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”⁽²¹⁾ And does not God “know how to deliver the godly out of temptations (or testings)?”⁽²²⁾ And do we not remember that one of the signs of his near coming is that they “shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you”?⁽²³⁾ And what if God, in his own infinite wisdom and love, allows one saint to be killed and another to survive? In Acts chapter twelve we see James executed but Peter rescued. Did James do something terribly wrong, or did the Lord love Peter more than James? No, of course not. So we should not think that, because the Lord sometimes allows his people to suffer much tribulation, that he does not love us.

Moreover, there is a qualitative difference between the judgments during the first three and a half years, and what happens in the second. As bad as the first period will be, with the judgments coming along with the seven seals and seven trumpets,

the second period will be terrible. The antichrist will then be fully revealed, and Jesus warns, “then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” ⁽²⁴⁾ This is the time, this second three and a half years, that Jeremiah speaks of when he says: “Alas, for the day is great, so that there is none like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble.” ⁽²⁵⁾ And this is the time spoken of by Daniel: “and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time.” ⁽²⁶⁾ It is this time, this second three and a half year period, that the Lord does not want his people to go through.

And the message to the church at Philadelphia? Well, it was just that: a message to the church at Philadelphia. It is true that what the Lord says to his people at one time, is of spiritual benefit to his people of any time, as the Lord tells us: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches.” ⁽²⁷⁾ He says “churches” (plural). That is, to all churches regardless of geography and time. But it is wrong to take the promise to that church at that time and apply it to our own position in this time. Great suffering and persecution against the saints was about to fall upon the known world at that time. God says he would keep the church at Philadelphia from that time of great persecution.

And why just select that message? Why not select the message to the church at Smyrna? The Lord’s message to that church was somewhat different. He said to that church: “Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” ⁽²⁸⁾ So we must be careful how we read, making sure we take all the counsel of God, not just the bits and pieces that suit us.

The second point often raised, is the apparent chronology of events in the book of Revelation. We see the church in heaven in

Revelation chapters three and four, before we see the antichrist coming, and the commencement of the Lord's judgments, in chapter six.

Now we should understand that the God of eternity often declares in his word, things from the past, present, and future, and not always in that order. He can, and does, move from the immediate present to the near future, and to the far off future, and back again, in the space of a few verses. This is not with the intention of confusing us, but we must remember that, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (29) He is the God of eternity. For example, in Revelation 11:15 we read the triumphant "voices in heaven saying, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." Now, from our perspective of time, this is a bit premature, for the Lord will have to wait another three and a half years for this to be a reality. But from the Lord's perspective it is done. His bride is in heaven, and the rest just a formality, so to speak.

That is just what the Lord wants us to have: a heavenly perspective, to "sit together in heavenly places." (30) And so he calls John up into heaven by the spirit, and shows to him, that all that is going to happen on the earth, beginning from chapter six on, is being orchestrated from heaven. The Lord is in charge. His timing is perfect. Just as we see in the opening chapters of Job, the enemy can only do just so much as the Lord permits. We read in Revelation, especially from chapter thirteen on, when the antichrist is reigning in the second three and a half years, the little phrase, "was given to him". For example, "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." (31) Who is giving? It is the Lord himself, so that even the devil shall fulfill the will of the Lord. We see the same principal operating in

the destruction of Babylon, the apostate Roman church , by the European kings, when we read, “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will.” (32)

There is certainly a chronology of events from chapter six through to the end, but even then it is not always consistent, as we have seen. But Revelation chapters four and five are not part of the chronology of this seven year tribulation period, but a statement of the Lord’s power in heaven and in earth, of the sure and final victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The third point often raised is that Paul himself expected the Lord’s return in his lifetime, as we read in his letter to the church at Corinth: “and we shall be changed.” (33) Along with that, is the thought of millions of saints since, that the Lord could come at any time. The Lord could come today. So we should be ready. Implied then in this, is the thought that if I say that the Lord is not coming till the midst of the seven year tribulation period, then, firstly, I am saying that I know more than Paul, and, secondly, I am compromising the readiness of his saints for his return. This would be a grave accusation indeed, if it were so, and must be looked into with all seriousness.

Revelation from the Lord is always progressive, and successive generations of saints have had the benefit of earlier revelations. With respect, then, to the Lord’s coming; firstly Enoch “the seventh from Adam prophesied... saying, behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints.” (34) Then the lord revealed more to ones like Daniel and Zechariah, then more understanding to Paul in the New Testament, and finally a fuller revelation to John. It is never contradictory, but always fuller and progressive. Paul himself said: “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” (35)

Paul certainly longed for, and, yes, expected the Lord’s return for his church imminently. But he also knew that this must also be

preceded by the rise of the antichrist, the man of sin, as he wrote to the Thessalonians in chapter two of his second epistle. Now, from Paul's perspective, this could easily have occurred in his day. After all, the nation of Israel was in the land, the temple was still there, and Rome was the undisputed power of the day. But we, having the benefit of John's fuller revelation, and around two thousand years of history, know that the signs we looked at in chapter four are only now being seen.

We must read the Lord's word carefully and prayerfully. I don't mean by this, that we all need to go to bible college to learn how to analyse and dissect the scriptures. But we do need to "take heed what ye hear".⁽³⁶⁾ John, when he wrote his gospel, needed to correct a misunderstanding that many of the early Christians believed, that the Lord would come during John's lifetime. This wrong belief came about by not carefully listening to what Jesus said. And so John recounts what Jesus said to Peter, after his resurrection, concerning John himself: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee."⁽³⁷⁾ John did die, and the Lord has not yet come.

By the time Paul wrote to Timothy the second time, he knew that his "departure was at hand",⁽³⁸⁾ and that the Lord was therefore not returning in his lifetime. We do not see him despairing about this. On the contrary, his great heart of love for his Lord still longed for his return, and he could say, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing".⁽³⁹⁾ You see, he loved his appearing, though he knew by that stage he himself would not be living on this earth.

My dear fellow saint of God, the church must go through the first three and a half years of the tribulation period. The Lord will not come today for his bride. But, beloved, he might come for you or me today to call us home. Therefore I must be ready today. No, there is no room for carelessness here, but a “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God”,⁽⁴⁰⁾ that whether I am awake or asleep in Jesus, I will be with him.

I recall to mind that beautiful story of Mephibosheth, who had been slandered to David, yet who loved him and longed for his return. When David finally returned in triumph over the usurper, Mephibosheth met him, and, despite still losing out personally, could say: “Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.”⁽⁴¹⁾ I encourage you all to again read this story in the light of our Lord’s coming again. Then ask ourselves, how much do we really love our Lord just for himself alone, and the delight he will have, and not how we personally will gain. I think, when we are at that point, we have lost all sight of ourselves. And that is a blessed point to come to.

So, the Lord is coming for his bride, the church, at the last trump. But the Lord has further surprises for us, for the seventh trump also introduces seven thunders. And God tells John to “seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not”.⁽⁴²⁾ There are things still sealed that are going to happen at that time. Things yet to be revealed, as we get closer to that time. Further reason for each of us, not to be careless, but to keep very close to our Lord. Further reason for us to remain very humble, even like David who said, “Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother.”⁽⁴³⁾ For we know not when we will have reached the end of the first three and a half years, or what these thunders are, and therefore Jesus says to us:

“therefore be ye ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Now, in closing this chapter, I would like to share with you a beautiful illustration in the night sky of what we have been looking at. If you care to get up early one morning before the dawn, you will see the moon shining and a very bright star in the east, called the morning star. As you wait, you will then see further to the east the first light of the rising sun. As the new day dawns and the sun rises in the sky, the moon and the morning star are no longer seen, with the brilliance of the sun. The moon is a picture of the church shining in the darkness of this world. It has no light of its own, but reflects the sun's rays, just as we reflect the light of the Lord within us. The morning star shines forth only at the darkest part of the night, in the early morning. Jesus says, “I am...the bright and morning star”.⁽⁴⁵⁾ He comes just before the dawn, at the darkest time in the history of the world for his bride the church. And then shall the “Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings”.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The Lord Jesus Christ shall then shine as the sun, in the glory of his kingdom.

References:

- (1) Daniel 9:27 (2) Daniel 12:7 & Revelation 12:14
- (3) Revelation 11:2 & 13:5 (4) Revelation 11: 3 & 12:6
- (5) Daniel 9:27 (6) Daniel 11:31 (7) 2 Thessalonians 2:8
- (8) Revelation 10:6 (9) Revelation 10:7 (10) Ephesians 5:32
- (11) Matthew 16:18 (12) 2 Thessalonians 2:8
- (13) Revelation 12:12 (14) 1 Corinthians 15:51 & 52
- (15) Revelation 6:17 (16) Revelation 3:10 (17) Matthew 16:23
- (18) C.S Lewis ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’
- (19) 1 Thessalonians 1:10 (20) Habakkuk 3:2
- (21) Tertullian of Carthage around 150 AD to 220 AD
- (22) 2 Peter 2:9 (23) Matthew 24:9 (24) Matthew 24:21
- (25) Jeremiah 30:7 (26) Daniel 12:1 (27) Revelation 2:7
- (28) Revelation 2 :10 (29) 2 Peter 3:8 (30) Ephesians 2:6
- (31) Revelation 13:5 (32) Revelation 17:17
- (33) 1 Corinthians 15:52 (34) Jude 14 (35) 1 Corinthians 13:9
- (36) Mark 4:24 (37) John 21:22 & 23 (38) 2 Timothy 4:6
- (39) 2 Timothy 4:8 (40) 2 Peter 3:12 (41) 2 Samuel 19:30
- (42) Revelation 10:4 (43) Psalm 131:2 (44) Matthew 24:44
- (45) Revelation 22:16 (46) Malachi 4:2

- CHAPTER 7 -

HE THAT OVERCOMETH
SHALL INHERIT ALL
THINGS. ⁽¹⁾

Before we go on into this chapter, I am going to ask you to read the whole of Revelation chapter 12, and John's gospel chapter 12:1-3 and then John's gospel chapter 13:1-17.

In Revelation chapter twelve, the church is pictured as woman, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. This beautiful picture teaches us simply that the way to prepare us to reign with Jesus, and the only way we can shine for Jesus, is to be under the feet of our fellow saints. There is no place for pride in God's kingdom. This also is the message to us, plain and simple, in the two passages from John's gospel. In order for us to minister to the Lord, for "the house to be filled with the odour of the ointment," ⁽²⁾ we have to be at the Lord's feet. In order for us to "wash one another's feet", ⁽³⁾ we have to be at or under the feet of our brothers and sisters.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospels, the same shall save it."⁽⁴⁾ Herein lies the secret of an overcoming life. Nothing for self. All on the altar. "He must increase, but I must decrease."⁽⁵⁾ Jesus himself is the great overcomer and said to his disciples, "In

the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”⁽⁶⁾

Jesus also told them how he, living as a man, overcame the world, and how they could in the same way overcome the world, when he said, “As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me”⁽⁷⁾

The response of many was the same then as it has ever been: “Many therefore of his disciples when they heard this said, this is a hard saying; who can hear it.”⁽⁸⁾ And, “from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”⁽⁹⁾

Jesus did not plead with them to stay, nor did he apologise to them and say that, “I didn’t really mean that” or, “perhaps I was a little too hard, maybe there is an easier way.” Jesus always meant exactly what he said and, no, there is no easier way. He simply turned to the twelve and asked them “will ye also go away?”⁽¹⁰⁾ He turns to us today and asks us the same question. Each of us must answer in turn for himself.

The woman in Revelation twelve pains to “bring forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”⁽¹¹⁾ The woman is the church, and the man child is the body of overcomers from within the church. It is they who, like Jesus, have overcome the world, who will be “caught up to God and to his throne.”⁽¹¹⁾

To each of the seven churches in Asia, Jesus gives promises and rewards to those, in these same churches, who overcome the enemy. To the church at Thyatira in particular we read, “and he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron.”⁽¹²⁾ Thus clearly identifying the overcomers with the man child of Revelation twelve.

We need to say, now, that God’s heart is for all his blood bought saints to be overcomers. And he has made the way

possible for it to be so. We have a high priest in heaven, Jesus, who, “is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us.”⁽¹³⁾ We have unlimited access into his presence. He never sleeps or grows weary of our coming to him. He understands where we are at, for he was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”⁽¹⁴⁾ So then there is an open invitation to each one of us; “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”⁽¹⁵⁾ His mercy and grace never run out and is freely available to us, if we come to him in faith and humility. He is able. There is no question about that. Are we willing?

It is not just the strongest, ablest, or boldest among us. On the contrary, it is those saints who know full well their own sinfulness, their own weakness and disabilities, and learn then to lean upon him, to “live by me.” A child can overcome by simply trusting wholly on Jesus.

It is faith that the Lord is looking for, as Jesus said “when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”⁽¹⁶⁾ John writes: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”⁽¹⁷⁾ John is not saying here that all who are born again overcome the world, any more than when he writes that, “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,”⁽¹⁸⁾ is he saying that anyone who is born again does not commit sin. None of us can make that claim. No, it is Christ in us who overcomes the world, and, as we learn to live by the faith of the Son of God, then we also overcome the world.

The man child who was caught up unto God and to his throne overcame the enemy “by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”⁽¹⁹⁾ We see the enemy coming as the accuser, as the deceiver, and as the persecutor of the saints. When the accuser

comes, we trust only in the blood of Jesus Christ to, "purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (20) When he comes as the deceiver we know only the Word of God "is truth", (21) his spirit shall "guide us into all truth," (22) and we have a testimony according to that truth. And when the enemy comes with hatred and persecution we listen to Jesus when he says: "fear not them which kill the body," (23) and we are encouraged when we read Paul declaring: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (24)

It is faith the Lord is looking for, and we shall be rewarded then according to our faithfulness. This is so clear from the parable of the talents that Jesus told in Mathew chapter twenty five. It was not so much the number of talents that were given to each servant that was so important, but rather what they did with what they were given. When, in the parable, the master returned from his travels and saw that the servant who had been given the five talents had gained another five, and likewise the servant with the two talents had gained another two, he commended them both equally saying, "well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." (25)

Now some will say that this is teaching 'elitism' to say that only those saints who overcome will be caught up and not the entire church. Well, firstly, I'm not sure what the word elitism really means. It seems to infer some sort of unfairness, or favouritism to a select few. God is always fair and just and impartial and loves each of his saints dearly, but that does not mean that he does not choose his servants for different responsibilities in his kingdom. As we saw in an earlier chapter, David reigned approximately four thousand years ago. Do we not read a list of David's top thirty mighty men, and over them three,

and over those three, the chief three, and over the chief three yet another? ⁽²⁶⁾ And when our Lord was walking on this earth, did he not choose twelve to be with him, and of those twelve, did he not choose three, Peter, James and John, to be always closest to him?

Secondly what we are seeing here is simply what Jesus taught his disciples, and what his servants, by the Holy Spirit, taught the church. It is what Paul taught the church at Corinth when he exhorted them to take heed how they build upon the foundation of Christ. How and what they build will be tested by fire. If they build by faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit, their work shall endure, and they shall be rewarded. But “If any man’s work shall be burned he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” ⁽²⁷⁾

As we said before, it is God’s great desire that all of his people would overcome the enemy. It is also God’s great desire that all men be saved, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” ⁽²⁸⁾ But God knows that, “men loved darkness rather than light,” ⁽²⁹⁾ and therefore Jesus said: “for many are called but few are chosen.” ⁽³⁰⁾ And of those who are chosen, how many are faithful? We read towards the end of Revelation that only those who are faithful will be with him in the final judgment: “and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” ⁽³¹⁾

And Paul taught his son in the faith, Timothy that if we are not willing to suffer, then the Lord cannot trust us to reign. “If we suffer we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us” ⁽³²⁾

The message, then, that Jesus and his early apostles taught, is plain and simple: only those saints who are faithful with what God has entrusted to them, and are willing to suffer for his name’s

sake, will the Lord entrust to rule in his kingdom. And it is only the bride of Christ that shall reign with Christ.

This is why, then, Paul so strongly and passionately urges the saints at Philippi, and testifies to them saying “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” ⁽³³⁾ The life of Christ is given to us as a gift at new birth, but this intimacy with Christ, this position as a co-ruler, Paul says is a prize to be won. He goes on to say “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” ⁽³⁴⁾ Now what is Paul talking about here, “Attaining unto the resurrection of the dead”? Salvation is not of works, and whether Paul likes it or not, he along with everyone else will be resurrected on the last day. No, Paul is talking here about the first resurrection which we read about in Revelation chapter twenty. This is the resurrection of all those saints who have overcome the enemy in their generation and are now asleep in Jesus. These are the ones who shall “prevent” (or go before) the overcoming saints living at that time, who will be caught up to meet them with the Lord in the air. ⁽³⁵⁾ Therefore we read, “And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years but the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.” ⁽³⁶⁾ This is why Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to, “run, that they may obtain,” ⁽³⁷⁾ and knew that even he could “be a castaway.” ⁽³⁸⁾ In other words that Paul himself could miss out on this prize of the first resurrection, of reigning with Christ as part of his bride for a thousand years.

So now we understand better when the Lord Jesus says to, “Watch therefore,” ⁽³⁹⁾ and, “Be ye ready also,” ⁽⁴⁰⁾ and “ye

yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.”⁽⁴¹⁾ Why be watchful? Why get ready? Why be in a state of waiting if all believers are caught up? It just doesn’t make any sense. No, a thousand times no! It is his disciples that Jesus is talking to when he says: “Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”⁽⁴²⁾ It is not that one is a believer and the other is not. They are both believers, and Jesus says “watch therefore; for you know not what hour your Lord doth come.”⁽⁴³⁾ Non believers are not watching in any case. It is an admonition to his disciples to watch.

In the Old Testament, Enoch is a good example of one who is ready to be caught up. We read of him in Genesis simply as one who “walked with God.”⁽⁴⁴⁾ In Hebrews chapter eleven, he is mentioned in the ‘roll call of faith.’ “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him.”⁽⁴⁵⁾

Another one mentioned in this chapter is Abraham. The stark contrast between the life of Abraham and that of his nephew, Lot, illustrates perfectly the difference between a believer living by faith and one living by sight. One who overcomes the world, and one who is overcome by the world. One who will be in the bride of Christ to rule with Christ, and one who will have to wait “until the thousand years are finished” to be resurrected, who will be “saved so as by fire.”

That there are saints here during both the first and second three and a half year periods is clear from scripture. In Revelation chapter six, which is in the first three and a half year period, we read the message given to the saints in heaven waiting for their resurrection bodies that they, “should rest yet for a little season,

until their fellow servants also, and their brethren, that should be killed as they were should be fulfilled.”⁽⁴⁶⁾ And in Revelation chapter thirteen, which is in the second three and a half years, we read “and it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them.”⁽⁴⁷⁾

To say that these are only those who have come to Christ during that time is to draw a very long bow indeed. No. Not only will all the church go through the first three and a half year period, but those saints who were not watching, who were not ready, shall have to endure the tremendous suffering and persecution of the antichrist in the last three and a half years before the Lord’s return. As we read in Revelation chapter twelve, “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.”⁽⁴⁸⁾ When the overcoming saints are caught up to heaven (the rapture) at the end of the first three and a half years, the Devil, or Satan, has no longer any access into heaven and is cast down to the earth, and he will then hate and persecute the saints who are left behind. That will be a time of great travail for the church that is left. As we read in Isaiah, “Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.”⁽⁴⁹⁾ Thus the great urging of the Holy Spirit and the warning from Jesus to watch and pray, to get ready lest we be like Lot who only escaped by the ‘skin of his teeth,’ and have to endure the reign of the beast.

Yet now we see also the great patience, wisdom and mercies of the Lord toward those saints left behind. They now know they have been left behind, and their only recourse is to flee into the wilderness, but here the Lord says “she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”⁽⁵⁰⁾

In that time those who do not take the mark of the beast cannot buy or sell, and those who refuse to worship the image of the beast will be killed. Many of those saints then shall be killed,

but also, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”⁽⁵¹⁾ In their great trial many of these saints turn to keep the commandments of God by faith, refuse to take the mark of the beast, refuse to worship the image of the beast, and are killed. They will be part of the first resurrection: “and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their forehead, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”⁽⁵²⁾ They will be part of the bride of Christ. The Lord has given them a second chance to overcome, and they have taken it. But what suffering they will have to endure.

The story of Samson in the book of Judges beautifully illustrates this thought. He was a child of promise and grew up a Nasserite, his long hair being a symbol of his separation unto God. As such he had great power to defeat the enemies of Israel. But he became proud and careless and the lusts of his flesh led him into a carnal relationship with an ungodly woman. He forgot that the source of his strength was from God. After his hair was cut he “wist (knew) not that the Lord was departed from him.”⁽⁵³⁾ He thought he could go out and fight the Philistines as before, but was captured, his eyes were put out, and he was bound with chains and became an object of mocking and ridicule. It was in this sad state that he turned to the Lord with all his heart, cried out for the Lord to again be his strength, and at the end achieved a great victory for the Lord. But it had cost him much pain and suffering and finally his life. It would have been better for him to have retained his separation from the world and continued to walk with God. It would be better for you, dear saint of God, and I, to continue to abide in him, and so be ready when he comes.

Now, a question for those who still think that all saints will be caught up when he comes; that all will be his kings and priests; that all his saints shall reign with him. The question is simply this: who will the saints be reigning over? You might say: the angels. And, yes, it is certainly true that the saints “shall judge angels.”⁽⁵⁴⁾ But is that all? Well, the answer is found in Revelation chapter twenty one, where we are given a glimpse into the new heaven and earth. We see the holy city, New Jerusalem, and “the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”⁽⁵⁵⁾ Then John continues to tell us that he saw, “the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.”⁽⁵⁶⁾

Who are “the nations of them which are saved”? They are the millions of old and new testament saints whose names were found “written in the book of life,”⁽⁵⁷⁾ but had not, by faith, overcome the world. Who are “the kings of the earth”? They are those saints who have been willing to forsake all to follow Christ. They have been trained by the Holy Spirit in the school of Christ to rule with Christ in his thousand year kingdom on this earth, and who are now ruling with Christ on the new earth in the everlasting kingdom.

Now you might be one who says “I don’t really want to be a king. I don’t really want to rule over other people and boss them around. I am quite content to occupy a back seat in the congregation.” Well, there are a few things to say about that frame of mind. Firstly, it is the desire of God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit for you and I to be co- rulers with our Lord Jesus Christ in his kingdom. Remember, it is the bride of Christ who shall reign with Christ.

Secondly, remember it is not so much the measure of talents or gifts that we have that is so important, but rather what we do with what we have. “The gifts and the calling (are) of God.”⁽⁵⁸⁾

That's his business. What I do with what he has given me is my business. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (59) And, if you and I are faithful over the few things, then the Lord can entrust to us the bigger things in his kingdom.

Thirdly, it is only as I learn to come under the authority of Christ can he then entrust me to exercise authority on his behalf. It is not for self, nor from self. It is for the glory of God and for the benefit and blessing of those who then are brought under the authority of Christ.

Fourthly, it is never a question of bossing people around. As we have seen, God's kings have learnt to be at the feet of their fellow saints to serve them. It is nothing of personal ego, but rather the Father's good will and pleasure to reward his saints. And what do they do with the crowns God has given them? They "cast their crowns before the throne saying, thou art worthy to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." (60)

So then we need to search our hearts, if this is not our longing and desire. Are you truly born again, or born from above? Can you see the kingdom of God? Or can you only see things with your natural eyes and understand things with your natural mind? If you are not sure, then make sure, and without delay. The Lord will receive you just as you are, a foolish lost sinner, (as we all were) and cleanse you in his precious blood, and come to live in you by his Holy Spirit.

If you are sure that you are a child of God, that you have been born of the Spirit, then return to the Lord with all your heart, stop laying up for yourself treasures upon earth and make him your treasure, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (61)

References:

- (1) Revelation 21:7
- (2) John 12:3
- (3) John 13:14
- (4) Mark 8:35
- (5) John 3:30
- (6) John 16:33
- (7) John 6:57
- (8) John 6:60
- (9) John 6:66
- (10) John 6:67
- (11) Revelation 12:5
- (12) Revelation 2:26 & 27
- (13) Hebrews 7:25
- (14) Hebrews 4:15
- (15) Hebrews 4:16
- (16) Luke 18:8
- (17) 1 John 5:4
- (18) 1 John 3:9
- (19) Revelation 12:11
- (20) Hebrews 9:14
- (21) John 17:17
- (22) John 16:13
- (23) Matthew 10:28
- (24) Romans 8:18
- (25) Matthew 25:21 & 23
- (26) 2 Samuel 23:8-38
- (27) 1 Corinthians 3:15
- (28) John 3:16
- (29) John 3:19
- (30) Matthew 22:14
- (31) Revelation 17:14
- (32) 2 Timothy 2:12
- (33) Philippians 3:8
- (34) Philippians 3:10 & 11
- (35) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17
- (36) Revelation 20:4-6
- (37) 1 Corinthians 9:24
- (38) 1 Corinthians 9:27
- (39) Matthew 25:13
- (40) Luke 12:40
- (41) Luke 12:36
- (42) Matthew 24:40 & 41
- (43) Matthew 24:42
- (44) Genesis 5:24
- (45) Hebrews 11:5 & 6
- (46) Revelation 6:11
- (47) Revelation 13:7
- (48) Revelation 12:13
- (49) Isaiah 66:7
- (50) Revelation 12:14
- (51) Revelation 14:12
- (52) Revelation 20:4
- (53) Judges 16:20
- (54) 1 Corinthians 6:3
- (55) Revelation 21:23
- (56) Revelation 21:24
- (57) Revelation 20:15
- (58) Romans 11:29
- (59) 1 Corinthians 10:31
- (60) Revelation 4:10 & 11
- (61) Matthew 6:21

- CHAPTER 8 -

BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM

Please read the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew's gospel chapter twenty five and verses one to thirteen. When we read what is said in verse six, "behold the bridegroom cometh", the sense here is not one of contemplative meditation as in beholding something (in this case the bridegroom, as we wrote in chapter two). This is an exclamation, and the word 'cometh' is actually added in the Authorised Version. He is not coming. He is here! Look the bridegroom is here. He has come. There is no time now to get ready. It is too late. The door is shut. Either we are ready or we are not. And those that are truly wise amongst his people will ready themselves, as we read: "the bride hath made herself ready."⁽¹⁾

Now the meaning of the parable is just so clear that we really have to be quite dishonest to miss the point. To say that the five wise were truly born again and the five foolish were not, is a grave error, and "makes the word of God of none effect."⁽²⁾ It takes away the impact of what Jesus is saying altogether. If the parable is about five believers and five non believers, then there is no need for the "watch therefore." But Jesus did say "watch therefore" and so I as a believer must take heed and watch to be ready.

It seems almost a chore to have to prove that all ten virgins are believers or disciples of Jesus, but let us, nevertheless, for the

sake of those still doubting. Firstly, the Lord speaks of all ten as virgins, speaking to us of those that have been purified in the blood of Christ, that they have been given the gift of righteousness, as Paul wrote to the church of Corinth, “for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”⁽³⁾

Secondly, they all had lamps which were burning at some stage and they all had oil, so the lamps could burn. The lamps speak to us of the testimony of the life of Christ in the believers, and the oil speaks to us of the Holy Spirit. The ten of them were born of the spirit and at one time had a life and testimony that shone out. As Jesus said, “let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.”⁽⁴⁾ Jesus never wastes words, or speaks something that means nothing just for the sake of saying it. If our lights could not go out, if they could not stop burning, then what Jesus said is meaningless. No, it is because there is a danger of our light going out that Jesus warns us.

Now we know also that the Holy Spirit is a gift. I cannot think to buy it as did Simon the sorcerer in Acts chapter eight. But for us to be filled with the Spirit, for our lamps to be burning brightly in this dark world, it is going to cost us something. This is the meaning in the parable of the wise telling the foolish to buy for themselves. I cannot borrow your testimony. I certainly can be encouraged by your testimony. But it is your testimony, not mine. You have had to prove the Lord in the hard place, you have had to forsake either family or friends or job or reputation for the Lord’s sake. You have had to witness for Jesus where hearts are hard to him. To have a shining testimony for Jesus will cost us something. We are all different, and the Lord will ask different things from each of us. But one thing is sure it will cost you and I something. If I am not willing to pay the price, I will not have a

shining testimony for the Lord, and therefore I will not be ready for the Lord when he comes. I cannot borrow your oil.

Now the Lord asks us, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”⁽⁵⁾ A wise virgin and a wise steward. One who is ready to pay the price to have a clear and shining testimony, and one who is ready to feed the Lord’s people with the precious word of life. As Jesus asked Peter three times, so he asks us, “lovest thou me more than these?”⁽⁶⁾ There is always a “these” for each one of us. For Peter it was his love of fishing. There is certainly nothing wrong with fishing. But the plain and simple of the matter is, Peter could not feed the Lord’s sheep and lambs and, “go a fishing” at the same time. And so the Lord brings each one of us to a choice sometime in our life, whether we will love him more than these, whatever ‘these’ may be in your life and mine.

Thirdly the unsaved are not trimming their lamps to go out to meet the bridegroom, and they certainly would not be aware that their lamps had gone out.

No, it is to his own disciples that the Lord gives this warning and admonition. He says to those who were not ready, who were shut out, and when they came knocking on the door, “I know you not.” That is, like Samson, they “knew not that the Lord had departed from them.”⁽⁷⁾ Paul exhorted Timothy to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,”⁽⁸⁾ and warning “If we deny him, he will deny us.”⁽⁹⁾ If I am not willing to be identified with Christ now how can I expect to be part of his bride?

So it is a matter of the will. Remember, “He is able.” Am I willing? We know the story of Abraham’s servant being sent to look for a bride for Isaac in Genesis chapter twenty four. Before he set off, the servant asked Abraham, “Peradventure the woman

will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?"⁽¹⁰⁾ Abraham's answer came ever so clearly, "And Abraham said unto him, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again."⁽¹⁰⁾ Abraham here is a picture of God the Father, Isaac a picture of God the Son, the unnamed servant a picture of God the Holy Spirit, and Rebekah a picture of the church, the bride of Christ. The Holy Spirit is searching for those to be in the bride," reproving the world of sin, righteousness and of judgment,"⁽¹¹⁾ and revealing Christ to those who believe. He gives gifts to the church and beautifies her to present her to Christ. In the story, after they had heard the servant's testimony of God's leading, had seen the precious gifts of gold, and heard of the greatness of Abraham, the family asked Rebekah, "wilt thou go with this man?" And she said, "I will go."⁽¹²⁾ Thank God she was willing. It would have been no good for Rebekah to say 'Yes I am willing to marry Isaac but I want to live here with my family. Can you please go back and bring Isaac here to me.' No, that would not have done at all. The servant was under strict instructions from Abraham not to bring his son back again. And Christ will not come back to be sacrificed again for his church, to again prove his love. He will not follow us. We must follow him. He will never lower his standard but raises us up to him. We must go to where he is. We must "follow on to know the Lord."⁽¹³⁾

The Song of Songs is another beautiful story of the marvelous love and grace of God to call us as his bride to follow him. There are three key verses which reflect three different stages in the Shulamite woman's following and her changing attitude towards her heavenly lover. The first in chapter two, verse sixteen, "My beloved is mine, and I am his: He feedeth among the lilies." The second in chapter six, verse three: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies:" And finally in

chapter seven, verse ten we read of her simply saying, “I am my beloved’s and his desire is towards me.”

There is never any doubt of her love for him, even from the start. But her love is an imperfect and inconsistent love, whereas his is always a perfect love. She loves him but she wants him on her terms. She possesses him and she is the centre of their relationship. She is taken up with the blessing she receives and when he doesn’t behave as she expects him to, she becomes temperamental and blurts out “I am sick of love.”⁽¹⁴⁾ But he continues to woo her and calls to her “rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.”⁽¹⁵⁾ He is full of boundless energy and comes “leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.”⁽¹⁶⁾

He calls her to come with him to the mountains of Bether. Bether means divisions. There is always division when Jesus Christ comes into our life. A separation immediately of light from darkness, and of carnal from spiritual. Jesus asked his disciples, “suppose ye that I am come to give peace on the earth? I tell ye Nay; but rather division. For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father. The mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother. The mother in law against her daughter in law and the daughter in law against her mother in law.”⁽¹⁷⁾ And so the mountains of Bether can be a bitter experience for us, but they are sweetened by the Lord’s presence with us.

She loses touch with him but then seeks him and finds him. How like us. The Lord waits for us to follow and when at times we don’t, we lose the sense of his presence. We know then we can’t go on without seeking and finding him. Thank God for the watchers - those who watch over the flock.

He moves on to the “mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense,”⁽¹⁸⁾ and calls to her to, “come with me.... From the

lions dens, from the mountains of the leopards.”⁽¹⁹⁾ He is calling her to come away with him and to “know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death.”⁽²⁰⁾

Jesus never forces us to follow, nor does he tell us to go here or go there on our own. He simply calls us to follow him to be with him where he is. He is the good shepherd. And as we follow, he promises to never leave us nor forsake us.⁽²¹⁾ Even if the lions or the leopards kill us, he is still with us as he was with Stephen.

Again he comes to her in chapter five, but she forgets that her beauty was only “perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee.”⁽²²⁾ She tries to beautify herself and perfect herself. By the time she is finished he is gone again. She, like the foolish Galatians, had left off faith and was now trying to make herself perfect by the flesh.⁽²³⁾ And, like the Galatians, needed this time a sharp rebuke. Just like Peter did, and we do from time to time. “The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me.”⁽²⁴⁾

But she loves him, receives correction, and knows only that “his mouth is most sweet: yea he is altogether lovely.”⁽²⁵⁾ He alone has “the words of eternal life.”⁽²⁶⁾ And so she comes to the point where she can say “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.” She is still in the picture but he now has the pre-eminence. He is first and she follows.

Until she finally comes to the point where she simply says “I am my beloved’s and his desire is toward me.”⁽²⁷⁾ That is enough for her. She is completely satisfied in him. She is now ready to go forth with him into the field, to lodge in the villages, to get up early to the vineyards. There she experiences the fullness of his love.⁽²⁸⁾ She simply wants to be with him, where he is. Nothing else will do. She is not like Lot’s wife, looking back, and thinking

of what she has left behind. She has eagle's wings. She is the Lamb's bride.

And our Lord is calling you and I to be part of his beautiful bride.

References:

- (1) Revelation 19:7
- (2) Mark 7:13
- (3) 2 Corinthians 11:2
- (4) Luke 12:35
- (5) Luke 12:42 & 43
- (6) John 21:15 & 16
- (7) Judges 16:20
- (8) 2 Timothy 2:3
- (9) 2 Timothy 2:12
- (10) Genesis 24:5 & 6
- (11) John 16:8
- (12) Genesis 24:58
- (13) Hosea 6:3
- (14) Song of Songs 5:8
- (15) Song of Songs 2:10
- (16) Song of Songs 2:8
- (17) Luke 12:51-53
- (18) Song of Songs 4:6
- (19) Song of Songs 4:8
- (20) Philippians 3:10
- (21) Hebrews 13:5
- (22) Ezekiel 16:14
- (23) Galatians 3:3
- (24) Song of Songs 5:7
- (25) Song of Songs 5:16
- (26) John 6:68
- (27) Song of Songs 7:10
- (28) Song of Songs 7:11 & 12

- CHAPTER 9 -

KNOWING THEREFORE
THE TERROR OF THE
LORD, WE PERSUADE
MEN ⁽¹⁾

Now we have been looking at some heavenly things, and looking at the blessings bestowed upon faithful service. We have also been warned about not being ready for the heavenly bridegroom; that we could miss out on being part of the bride. And we have stopped there. We are reluctant to go on any further. But Jesus does, and we must follow. When we read the parables of the kingdom in Matthew chapter twenty four from verse forty five to fifty, and in Luke chapter twelve verses forty two to forty eight, we are shocked at the words of Jesus at the end. He calls one of his servants who begins to, “beat the menservants and the maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken,”⁽²⁾ an evil servant, and says that he will “cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”⁽³⁾ This is not the image we like to have of Jesus. That is because most Christians don’t read their bibles. Or, if they do, they somehow filter out whole slabs of scripture that don’t fit into their theology, or don’t fit their idea of Jesus.

When we read the ‘Lord’s prayer’ in Matthew chapter six from verse nine to thirteen, we forget the Lord added straight after: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you: but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”⁽⁴⁾

If we harbour a bitter and unforgiving spirit we are in danger of eternal judgment. The Lord brought this home forcefully in yet another parable of the kingdom in Matthew chapter eighteen, verses twenty three to thirty five. We read there of the servant who had been forgiven much by his lord but who would not forgive one of his fellow servants who owed him a very little. Jesus ends the parable with “and his lord was wrath and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.”⁽⁵⁾ And Jesus concludes, “so likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.”⁽⁶⁾

Now just before, we looked at one of the parables of the kingdom that Jesus told, about the evil servant beating his fellow servants and getting drunk. We took the account from Luke chapter twelve, and in that account, Jesus told that the lord would “appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”⁽⁷⁾ In the same parable in Matthew’s gospel chapter twenty four, we read that: “the lord of that servant shall ...appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”⁽⁸⁾ Hypocrites and unbelievers share the same dreadful fate: eternal damnation. Jesus was so strong on this point. Read again for yourself Matthew chapter twenty three, and get a fresh feeling for the intensity and hatred Jesus had for hypocrisy. And then ask him to fill you with his same spirit. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.... Ye shall receive the greater damnation.”⁽⁹⁾ And concludes, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

The Lord was equally as strong in dealing with hypocrisy in the early church. In Acts chapter five we read the story of a husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira, who pretended to be generous and openhearted and, as Peter told them, they “Lied not unto men but unto God.”⁽¹⁰⁾ God’s judgment was swift and both lives were cut off.

I remember that we were going through the Acts in our weekly bible study, some years ago. We came to Acts chapter five and, after we had read the story, one young brother commented ‘I don’t think that was a very Christian thing to do.’ After I had showed to him that it was not Peter but rather God himself who had taken their lives in judgment, he replied ‘Well I still don’t think it was very Christian of him to do that.’ Now we smile at the thought of someone saying that God was not behaving in a Christian like manner. But in our thoughts we can say the same thing. We can be just like Peter who rebuked Jesus saying that he (Jesus) was mistaken in going to the cross, “Be it far from thee Lord, this shall not be unto thee,”⁽¹¹⁾ or in Acts chapter ten when he was telling God that he (God) had got it wrong about the dietary laws, “Not so Lord.”⁽¹²⁾ If we are to have the mind of Christ we need to humble ourselves and just believe what God says, and learn again to reverence and fear this great God.

The Holy Spirit had been working mightily with the early disciples. The river of life was flowing, many were being saved and added to the church, and there was such a fresh and open heart among them as we read, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which they possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”⁽¹³⁾ Little wonder the spirit of God was able to work so powerfully among them. So to stem this river of life, Satan tried to introduce his deadly poison of hypocrisy among them. This was a leaven that would have quickly spread

and drained the life of Christ from the church. The Lord (and now Peter working in complete oneness with his Lord) acted swiftly and decisively. The result? “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought.... And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” ⁽¹⁴⁾ The river of life was flowing again.

This is something that God’s saints, who are to be in the bride of Christ, must learn to do: to stand with God in his judgments. There are times when we need to plead with God for mercy as did Abraham for the city of Sodom. There are times when we need to stand with God in his judgment as did Phinehas and Peter. May the Lord grant us the wisdom and discernment to choose rightly. Remember it is the bride of Christ in heaven who cries out: “Alleluia; Salvation and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.” ⁽¹⁵⁾

And it will be the bride of Christ who will be with him when he comes to judge the earth and put down all rebellion against him.

Now you might be saying, ‘surely this servant who beat his fellow servants is not a true servant of God. He is surely not truly born again. Surely Ananias and Sapphira were never truly the Lord’s.’ Do not be deceived. The Lord himself calls him his servant, and Ananias and Sapphira were convicted by the Holy Spirit within them, but hardened their hearts and lied to the Holy Spirit. And the promises of God assuring us of eternal salvation? Hallelujah, every promise in the book is mine. “ There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” ⁽¹⁶⁾ And to his

sheep who hear his voice and follow him: “they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”⁽¹⁷⁾ There is no inconsistency with God or his promises. “For all the promises of God in him (Jesus Christ) are yea, and in him Amen.”⁽¹⁸⁾

We are not going around frightened in case we sin and drop into hell. John Wesley put it this way: “We are saved from the fear, though not from the possibility, of falling away from the grace of God, and coming short of the great and precious promises.”⁽¹⁹⁾ If we sin, “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,”⁽²⁰⁾ and, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁽²¹⁾ He is our good shepherd. If we go astray he will correct us in measure, and encourage us back to him. So we should never harden our hearts to him. Remember the ‘evil’ servant started down his wayward path by entertaining the thought, “My lord delayeth his coming.”⁽²²⁾

Now in concluding this chapter, we should take note both of what Jesus said to John in the Revelation: “Behold I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”⁽²³⁾ Also of what he taught his disciples in Luke chapter twelve: “and that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.”⁽²⁴⁾ So on the one hand, rewards, and on the other, punishments. We are so like those children sitting in the market place Jesus spoke of.⁽²⁵⁾ So fickle. We like the rewards but don’t want to hear about the punishments. Well, we need to grow up and take all the counsel of God and eat the strong meat of the word.⁽²⁶⁾ For it is all given for our profit, and it is all given in love, for it comes from God.

In the verse that comes just before the one in our chapter heading, Paul reminds the church at Corinth: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad.”⁽²⁷⁾

It will not be what I profess, but what I do, that will count in that day.

References:

- (1) 2 Corinthians 5:11
- (2) Luke 12:45
- (3) Luke 12:46
- (4) Matthew 6:14 & 15
- (5) Matthew 18:34
- (6) Matthew 18:35
- (7) Luke 12:46
- (8) Matthew 24:51
- (9) Matthew 23:14
- (10) Acts 5:4
- (11) Matthew 16:22
- (12) Acts 10:14
- (13) Acts 4:32
- (14) Acts 5:11-14
- (15) Revelation 19:1 & 2
- (16) Romans 8:1
- (17) John 10:27 & 28
- (18) 2 Corinthians 1:20
- (19) ‘Salvation by Faith’ preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford 18th June 1738
- (20) 1 John 2:1
- (21) 1 John 1:9
- (22) Matthew 24:48
- (23) Revelation 22:12
- (24) Luke 12:47 & 48
- (25) Luke 7:32
- (26) Hebrews 5:12
- (27) 2 Corinthians 5:10

- CHAPTER 10 -

AND WHAT SHALL THIS
MAN DO? ⁽¹⁾

This of course was the question Peter asked the Lord regarding John. The Lord basically told Peter to mind his own business, not to worry too much about what John was going to do, but rather to first make sure that he himself was following. So then, that is our first priority to make sure that we individually, and our families, are following the Lord, regardless of who else does or does not. As Joshua testified to the children of Israel, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” ⁽²⁾ Sometimes, dear fellow saint, it may also come down to just saying ‘as for me, I will serve the Lord.’

So what shall I do then to be ready for the heavenly bridegroom? The little word ‘do’ is a very important word in the bible. It can also be a very dangerous word. It is important because what we truly believe in our heart is seen in what we say and what we do. Or as James put it: “I will show thee my faith by my works.” ⁽³⁾ As we concluded in the last chapter, it will not be what I profess, nor my knowledge of the scriptures, nor my understanding of the Lord’s will, but what I do, that will count in the day of the Lord.

As we before noted, Jesus was so strong on this point, and challenged those in Israel (and, by extension, us) “Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of

heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”⁽⁴⁾ He then told the story of the wise man and the foolish man, building their two houses. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”⁽⁵⁾ And the foolish man who heard, but did not, when the storms came, his house was destroyed.

So we have come down to a wise virgin and a foolish virgin, and a wise steward and a foolish steward, and, now, a wise man and a foolish man. A wise virgin who was willing to pay the price, a wise steward who was willing to feed his household, and now a wise man who was willing to do what Jesus taught him. They are the ones who will be ready for their heavenly bridegroom. They are the ones who have true joy, as Jesus told his disciples, “If ye know these things happy are ye if ye do them.”⁽⁶⁾

As we said before, the word ‘do’ can also be a very dangerous word, because as soon as I hear it I am tempted to immediately run out and ‘do’ something for the Lord. And that would be a big mistake. Jesus said so clearly, “without me you can do nothing.”⁽⁷⁾ Now that puts us right in our place. He does not say that without him we could not really do very much at all. He says we can do nothing. Now I can go out and do all sorts of things by myself, but nothing of eternal value in the kingdom of God. All would be wood, hay and stubble to be burnt up. All would be waste.

No, we have to get right back to basics, to have that “simplicity in Christ.”⁽⁸⁾ Remember the question the jailer asked the apostles in Acts chapter sixteen, “Sirs what must I do to be saved?”⁽⁹⁾ And the answer from Paul and Silas, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”⁽¹⁰⁾ To believe, to

fully trust in, to fully surrender to, the Lord Jesus Christ. To fully disbelieve in myself, to know from the bottom of my heart, that “in me dwelleth no good thing.” ⁽¹¹⁾ There is nothing for me to ‘do,’ not one thing, Christ has done it all.

And Paul himself when he was converted on the Damascus road, asked the Lord “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” ⁽¹²⁾ For three days he could do nothing, for he remained blinded by the shining light. He simply waited, appalled by his own spiritual blindness and enthralled by the mercy and grace of Jesus to the “chief of sinners.” Then it was told him what he must do.

And how do we go on from that point? The Lord was asked at one time, “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said unto them, “this is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” ⁽¹³⁾ Nothing different, just believe. Sounds too easy? Well, Jesus said it was easy. First he says to us “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” ⁽¹⁴⁾ The wonderful rest and peace of our burdens lifted at the cross. All my sins washed away in his precious blood never to be remembered against me anymore. But then comes the further invitation to us, “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” ⁽¹⁵⁾ He says his yoke is easy. The hard part for us, who are unaccustomed to the yoke, is to put our head down and be yoked together with him. We kick against the pricks, and it hurts. But when we just learn to yield to him in all points of our life, when we “cease from our own works as God did from his,” ⁽¹⁶⁾ we begin to learn of him and find that his yoke truly is easy, and his burden truly is light. In the words of the hymn writer “They who trust him wholly, find him wholly true.” ⁽¹⁷⁾

And this is a daily thing. This yielding, this trusting, this learning. It is not something we come to once or twice and then go

onto something else. It is in our daily walk with him that he reveals himself more to us, that we can prove his faithfulness, that we can grow to be more like him. It is in this daily walk that we can be prepared to meet our heavenly bridegroom. This, I believe is the meaning behind the words in the Revelation, “his wife has made herself ready.”⁽¹⁸⁾ We can pray to the Father, “give us this day our daily bread,”⁽¹⁹⁾ and Paul could say “I die daily.”⁽²⁰⁾ That is, die to all that was of Paul, of the old man, what he could do in his own strength.

The Lord does not then just leave us at the starting line saying: “without me you can do nothing,” but leads us on to where we can join Paul in his confident declaration: “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.”⁽²¹⁾ Now what are these “all things” Paul is talking about? Well, primarily they are the ordinary things that all of us have to do, and do them daily. (If the reader could please now just put this book down for a minute, and read from Colossians chapter three, verse twelve to the end of the chapter, as I want to just share a few things from this passage of scripture.)

The question was asked earlier as to what shall I do then to be ready for the heavenly bridegroom. Well, here in Colossians chapter three are a few things to do. Forbearing and forgiving one another, being thankful, (giving thanks in all things) and fellowshiping with one another in the word and songs. Sounds easy? Without abiding in Christ it is impossible.

To have fellowship in the word with our fellow saints implies that I myself am feeding upon the word. Reading the word, having my quiet time with the Lord, and fellowshiping with the saints should never be a burden, or a chore, or a matter of duty, but rather a joy. If it is a duty then it is me doing it, and it shall soon dry up. So then if I don't do it I will come under condemnation for not doing my duty (and try to bring others into

the same.) If I do it then I can congratulate myself and be very proud of my achievement and attendance record. Either way is a barren and dull existence. No, dear saint of God, never let us lose that sense of thrill to come into the Lord's presence to hear his voice, to laugh and sing aloud for joy, to receive some precious portion from his word. And it is daily.

David said, that to him, the word of the Lord was "sweeter than honey," ⁽²²⁾ and therefore something to be eaten and enjoyed. A good test to see if it is so with us is to go away on holidays with family or friends. Then just open the bible for a short time of family prayers in the morning to start the day. The response? "O come on, I thought we were on holidays. Do we still have to do that? Give us a break." You see, it's not a delight, it's a chore, and the Lord feels it. He does not feel welcome. If we are like that, then I don't believe we will be ready for his coming. You see, we would not really be happy to be 24/7 with the Lord. May the Lord enlarge our hearts to delight in him, to include him, and welcome him in all that we do, and so prepare our hearts to be caught up to meet him and so be "forever with the Lord." ⁽²³⁾

Now coming back to our portion in Colossians chapter three, and looking at doing all things through Christ. The simple injunction to us is: "and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." ⁽²⁴⁾ And the things to do? Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands (and give thanks to God for them.) Husbands love your wives (and give thanks to God for them.) Children obey your parents in all things (and give thanks to God for them.) Fathers don't provoke your children to wrath by being too harsh or legal (and give thanks to God for your children.) Lastly, servants obey in all things your masters (and give thanks to God for the employment you have.) Sounds easy? I repeat, without abiding in, and leaning on Christ, it is impossible.

So these are very practical and ‘down to earth’ things to do, just like John the Baptist told those who came to him, as he prepared the way for the Lord’s first coming. Just like us, they asked, “What shall we do then?” ⁽²⁵⁾ John’s reply: “he that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise,” and to the publicans “exact no more than that which is appointed you,” and to the soldiers and policemen, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely: and be content with your wages.” ⁽²⁶⁾ Now the Holy Spirit applies those exact same principles to us, as we ,in our day, await our Lord’s return.

So I think we have got to the point now where we realise it is not just getting excited, or enthused, or whipped up by some gifted preacher (though the Lord will use whom he will to exhort and edify the saints.) It goes much deeper than that. It goes to the very heart of our daily lives in our homes, in our work, and in our schools, and touches all our human relationships. It is always a heart matter with the Lord, as Paul goes on to say in Colossians chapter three, “and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men.” ⁽²⁷⁾

This is why I believe the Lord chose every day, even mundane illustrations of those who would be ready, of those who would be caught up. In Luke’s gospel chapter seventeen, Jesus tells of three groups of people: “I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed: the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” ⁽²⁸⁾ We have seen earlier in chapter seven that Jesus could only have been speaking of three groups of disciples here, and the first thing we note is a very practical one. That is, when the Lord does come, it will be daytime in some

parts of the earth and in other parts it will be nighttime. So some will be awake and some will be asleep.

Secondly, we note that these people are quite ordinary. Just like us. I have heard some say that when the Lord comes they want to be on their knees praying or leading someone to Christ. Now this is quite an admirable desire, and I would not discourage that, but also quite unnecessary in relation to our readiness for the Lord's return. It is not doing some great work for the Lord, but simply doing what he has given us to do, whether on our knees praying, or leading a soul to Christ, or whether it is working in the field, grinding at the mill, or something quite as ordinary as sleeping.

The third thing we note is that these groups of people were very close to each other, either family members or close friends. They knew each other well and were doing exactly the same thing, sleeping, labouring or grinding.

The fourth thing we cannot help but note is that "One shall be taken and the other left." Why? Because one was living by faith, and the other was not. Outwardly doing the same thing, but the Lord "Looketh on the heart," ⁽²⁹⁾ and says, "I the Lord search the heart; I try the reigns, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doing."⁽³⁰⁾ One was joyfully serving "as unto the Lord." The other, perhaps complaining and criticising in the heart, resentful, or maybe even envious of the other. Beware of a Martha type spirit entering into our service. The very moment we detect it in our own hearts, be ruthless in dealing with it. Lift your heart to our gracious Lord and thank him for the great privilege to serve him and his saints. Then with joy and peace go back to serving. Only such service is acceptable to the Lord.

On the other hand the service might be just to get the acclaim or the glory of men and the Lord simply says of such, "Verily I

say unto you, they have their reward.”⁽³¹⁾ But they miss out on the eternal reward. And when we go to sleep at night, how do we sleep? In the midst of great trouble, David could say “I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.”⁽³²⁾ And again in the next psalm, “I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.”⁽³³⁾ So even our sleep is a matter of faith and trust in him.

So one was taken and the other left. And the disciples naturally wanted to know where the one would be taken to. Jesus simply answered: “Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.”⁽³⁴⁾ We read about eagles in the book of Job. They make their nest on high, “dwell and abide on the rock,” “her eyes behold afar off” and “she feeds on the flesh and blood of the slain lamb.”⁽³⁵⁾ So, those who are taken, “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”⁽³⁶⁾ stand safe and secure on Christ the solid rock, by faith “See Jesus... crowned with glory and honour,”⁽³⁷⁾ feed on the eternal word of God, and keep their conscience clear through a strong confidence in the precious blood of Christ. These are the things to do.

We need then firstly to take heed to ourselves, and then watch out for our brothers and sisters. Not being a busybody and not fault finding, but rather in a spirit of meekness to care for and pray for our fellow believers. “By love serve one another.”⁽³⁸⁾ Because we love the brethren we want them to be ready for the heavenly bridegroom and to have a full reward. Not lording it over the flock, but coming alongside, as Paul beautifully put it: “not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.”⁽³⁹⁾

I have often observed that if we give ourselves to serving the need of the saints, or as some were “addicted to the ministry of the saints,”⁽⁴⁰⁾ then the Lord sees to our needs both spiritually and materially. The Lord is no man’s debtor. Maybe, then if we are

working in the field with our brother, or grinding at the mill with our sister, we might take the opportunity to pray for them and show kindness to them, and in some way encourage them with the eternal things of the kingdom of God. Then, maybe two will be taken, and none left! How wonderful that would be. And then we could join Paul in saying, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (41)

“So let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.” (42) When we get to the end of the bible, after reading of the rise of the antichrist, the persecution against the saints, and the awful judgments God will bring upon this earth, we might be tempted to faint. Then we get to the last verse and read: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all. Amen.” (43) It is grace that has saved us and his abundant, all sufficient grace will see us through. On our part it is: “faith which worketh by love,” (44) and on his part: “Grace, grace unto it.” (45) So then, having done those things he has put before us, by his grace, all that is left for us to do is join with the twenty four elders who, “fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne saying, Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” (46)

References:

- (1) John 21:21 (2) Joshua 24:15 (3) James 2:18
- (4) Matthew 7:21 (5) Matthew 7:24 & 25 (6) John 13:17
- (7) John 15:5 (8) 2 Corinthians 11:3 (9) Acts 16:30
- (10) Acts 16:31 (11) Romans 7:18 (12) Acts 9:6
- (13) John 6:28 & 29 (14) Matthew 11:28
- (15) Matthew 11:29 & 30 (16) Hebrews 4:10
- (17) 'Like a river Glorious' by Frances Havegal
- (18) Revelation 19:7 (19) Matthew 6:11
- (20) 1 Corinthians 15:31 (21) Philippians 4:13
- (22) Psalm 19:10 (23) 1 Thessalonians 4:17
- (24) Colossians 3:17 (25) Luke 3:10 (26) Luke 3:11-14
- (27) Colossians 3:23 (28) Luke 17:34-36 (29) 1 Samuel 16:7
- (30) Jeremiah 17:10 (31) Matthew 6:2 (32) Psalm 3:5
- (33) Psalm 4:8 (34) Luke 17:37 (35) Job 39:27-30
- (36) Ephesians 2:6 (37) Hebrews 2:9 (38) Galatians 5:13
- (39) 2 Corinthians 1:24 (40) 1 Corinthians 16:15
- (41) 1 Thessalonians 2:19 (42) Ecclesiastes 12:13
- (43) Revelation 22:21 (44) Galatians 5:6 (45) Zechariah 4:7
- (46) Revelation 4:10 & 11