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This is the last portion of our broad chronological journey through the scriptures. In the first few weeks of these devotions, we look at the humble nature of Christ which we should seek to develop in our own lives. In the last four weeks, we will be studying the end of history as we know it. The Book of Revelation was written to enable us to live with hope, encouragement, and anticipation of our Lord Jesus' eternal reign. Enjoy the wrap up!

WEEK 66 PUTTING OFF THE “OLD SELF”

By Chris Watson

In Romans 7:19-20 Paul says, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Paul understood what it meant to struggle with the old self. I think we can all attest to what Paul was saying. In fact, I say “Amen.” This week, we will see the only way we can continuously put off our old self is through Christ.

Day 1– Read Ephesians 4:17-24

Pigs wallow in the mud, it’s what they do. You can wash them, give them a bath, and they might stay clean for a few minutes, but if there is mud around, they will find their way back to it. Pigs want to get dirty, they enjoy wallowing in filth. Paul tells us this should not be the case for the believer. If we have been truly saved, cleaned by the blood of Jesus, we should not want to go back to our old ways. Paul tells us in Romans that it is a constant battle. Why should we not want to go back to such ways? In Verse 20 of today’s passage it says, “But have you not learned Christ.” It doesn’t say, “Have you not learned about Christ” but rather, it says “... not learned Christ Himself.” There is a big difference. One can learn about Christ and not know Him. But when one learns Christ Himself, he or she has come to know the person of Christ; they have experienced Him and realize that knowing Jesus is better than wallowing in the mud.

Warren Wiersbe says we have taken off the grave clothes and have put on the grace clothes. In other words, we don’t have to live like unbelievers anymore because we are not unbelievers; we have been cleansed and washed with the blood of Jesus. Have you been washed with His blood? Have you trusted Jesus? If so, God has given you the desire to walk with Him. It doesn’t mean you won’t

be tempted to go back to your old ways; the temptation will always be there as Paul reminds us. However, God's grace gives us what it takes to overcome and walk in tune with Him.

Take time today to thank the Lord for saving you and making you clean. If there is willful sin in your life you keep going back to, ask Him to give you victory over that sin. Daily ask Him to make you new, acknowledge that newness and allow Him to live through you.

Day 2– Read Ephesians 4:25-32

Paul goes from generic to specific today. In today's reading, he lists five sins: lying, anger, stealing, corrupt talk, and bitterness. He then takes these five and breaks them down.

Lying is contrary to truth and is spoken with intent to deceive. The life of a Christian is to be controlled by truth not lies. We know from scripture Satan himself is the father of liars. In the garden, Satan put the question in Adam and Eve's mind, "... Has God indeed said...?" Genesis 3:1 Are you a person who speaks truth or lies? Ask God to help you to be a person of truth.

Paul then moves on to anger. Verse 26 tells us to "... Be angry but sin not." We know this is easier said than done. In scripture God often had righteous anger, but in His anger He did not sin. However, in our anger, sin often creeps in. Warren Weirsbe says, "Sometimes a man's anger smolders, and this we would call malice; but this same anger can suddenly burst forth and destroy, and this we would call wrath." He goes on to say that, "the fire of anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the work of God."¹

¹ Be Rich, Warren Weirsbe

Paul goes on to speak about stealing. We know the scripture tells us the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. Proverbs tells us to go to the ant you sluggard and consider its ways. In other words, we don't need to steal if we are working and using our hands and minds the way the Lord intended.

Then comes the words corrupt speech. The mouth and the heart are connected and Matthew 12:34 tells us that out of the overflow, the mouth speaks. The words which come out of our mouths tell us what's really in our heart. Satan wants us to use words that tear down and Christ wants us to use words that build up. How are your words, and how are you using them? This is a question that I try to continually ask myself as this is a struggle I deal with.

Lastly, Paul talks about bitterness. "Bitterness refers to a settled hostility that poisons the whole inner man."² It has often been said that when things happen we can either become bitter or better. Bitterness is the easy route and better is the harder route but the right way.

What areas of your life, out of these five, does God need to work on? I have already shared for me, it's my words! Ask God to work in your heart and remember all of the work will be an inward change which results in an outward change.

Day 3– Read Ephesians 5:1-2

Any time we see the word therefore we need to ask what it's there for? If we go back to Chapter 4, we see Paul has reminded the believers they had put off the old self and put on Jesus. He then ended Chapter 4 by giving five things which should not be part of their lives as believers. Ephesians 4:32 says to "... be kind to one

² ibid

another and forgive one another." In Chapter 5, we see the connection of the therefore. Because we have been forgiven by Christ we

can, therefore, grasp and understand the words of Paul better in the first few verses of Chapter 5.

The first thing Paul instructs believers to do is be imitators of God. If Paul hadn't given the second verse, this first part, imitating God may seem a little mechanical or even legalistic. Some might say "I just have to imitate God." It's not just looking the part, but walking and knowing God. We should imitate God, but as Verse 2 tells us, we should do so as we walk in love. There it is, everything we are to do is because of love. We love because He first loved us, and because of that love, everything we do should be out of the love He gave us. Christ loves us and showed it when He gave Himself, the greatest sacrifice.

Why do you serve? Why do you love? Why do you go? Why do you teach and nurture? There are tons of questions and sometimes the answer is, "because it's the right thing to do." God works in our lives, the reason, our motivation for doing what we do, should be God's love and His free gift of salvation. We will sometimes get off the path, but when we are in tune and walking with God, our desire should be to imitate and walk with Him in love. All because He first loved us.

Day 4– Read Ephesians 5:3-21

Wherever you are, go find a dark room. Go in and turn on the light. What happened? As soon as you flipped the switch, the light dispelled the darkness. If you turn it off, it will be dark again. You might think this is a pointless exercise, but it is a great reminder of the world we live in. Our world is evil and often dark, but as Christians, if we shine the light, then the light will always dispel the darkness.

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” 1 John 1:5-7. Do you have the light of Jesus? If so, your light should shine brightly in this world. John tells us if we continually walk in the darkness, the light is not in us and we are liars.

Matthew 5:14 says, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” We are that light. Just like going into a dark room and turning on a light, we are to be the light to the world. In Verse 3 Paul mentions many dark things of the world that, as believers, we should stay away from. Rather, we are to walk in the light and in the wisdom that comes only from God.

How are you walking today? Is it in the light or darkness? Do you feel the need to hide or cover up or is everything out in the open with nothing to hide? Walk in the light of Jesus today. Our world needs the light and God has left us here to make that light known. Don't hide it under a bushell, or be ashamed of the light. His light is all we need.

Day 5– Read Psalm 44:11-22

Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 in Romans. Here is the quote and context. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are

more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Verse 22 speaks of persecution. Many of the disciples died for their faith as have many others. In Acts, we read about Stephen, who preached the true word to a group of people. What he said was true, but the people didn't like what He had to say and they stoned him to death. I feel certain Stephen realized he was about to die and he could have said something or done something to prevent his death. It would have involved going against what he believed and most likely denying Jesus for who He was. Instead, Stephen took the stoning and died a martyr. Acts 1:8 says that we will be Jesus' witnesses. The word witness here is the same word as martyr. We are to be Jesus' witnesses here and around the world even if it means dying for our faith and knowing we would be dying for the truth.

Because we live in America, we haven't experienced persecution in the way we read about in the Bible. We hear of very few that have actually died for their faith today. I personally believe if God tarries, it may only be a matter of time before we reach this point. Do you have the truth? Do you know the truth, the person of Truth, Jesus? Pray and ask God for you to be able to stand on the truth of Jesus Himself, no matter what may come your way.

WEEK 67 THE ARMOR OF GOD

By Dennis Watson

We live in a pretty scary world is an obvious and troubling statement. Jesus told us that in this world we would have trouble.

Peter reminded us Satan is like a roaring lion seeking to devour. This can be so scary! As God's children, we are not to be fearful, but to be people of love, power, and a sound mind. Where does that come from? This week's passages deal with this very thing. God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). He has provided for us instructions, the Holy Spirit, and armor which fits us for the battle.

Day 1– Read Ephesians 6:1-4

A lot of people get really bogged down with the question, “What is God's will for my life?” While they seek answers to the big question, they ignore many of the things they already know to be God's will. It has correctly been said, “If you take care of the small things, the big things take care of themselves” (Emily Dickinson). Today's passage seems to be rather insignificant; however, if it were followed faithfully, the earth would indeed be shaken. First, Paul told his readers, that children need to obey and honor their parents. The first place to learn how to treat other people with respect is in the home. The first place to learn to be obedient to authority is in the home. In Verse 1 He said this is right. If a person wants to be right, this person should obey and honor his or her parents. For how long? Always. Both of my parents have passed away, however, I still seek to honor them. It is right and it has a promise—long life.

Another seemingly little thing, also concerns parents. Family is so very significant in God's plan for the world. The family is where we grow and learn. It is the place of discovering ourselves and oth-

ers. It is where we learn to relate. Parents, and more specifically in this context, fathers, are called upon to not provoke their children to wrath. Fathers and mothers provoke and discourage their children by saying one thing and doing another. They also do it by always blaming and never praising. When parents neglect their children, the children are discouraged. Children who do not have good, clear, focused time with their parents are discouraged.

He did not stop with what not to do, but he gave parents further instruction. The literal phrase is, “Nurture them in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Fathers have the responsibility of nurturing both the wife and their children in the Lord. A good father does this by showing love and giving encouragement in the home to the wife and the children. The father’s role is more than simply providing food, clothing, and shelter. He is also to nurture them emotionally and spiritually. When Jesus was a child we read that, “He increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” **Luke 2:52** The parents are the ones responsible for nurturing the children.

Fathers and mothers also have the responsibility for disciplining the children. The word here is admonition. The word discipline refers to more than the punishment a child might receive; we all need to be disciplined, so we can bring our appetites under control. It really offends me to see adults who have no discipline in their lives. They eat what they want, as much as they want. Perhaps they stay up too late or behave like a couch potato. Discipline and disciplines are learned early. Parents need to teach their children to be responsible in their actions, words, and use of time and money. This is to be done in a positive and constructive way. Without anger!

Little things done daily, like obedience, honor, nurture, and discipline all add up.

Day 2– Read Ephesians 6:10-13

Verses 5-9 have to do with what today would be work relationships between employers and employees. Paul addressed home relationships and then work relationships. We now see what he had to say about the main point of this week: the place of the real struggle. The place of the real struggle for us, as believers, is in the spiritual realm. Our struggle is not against people or even circumstances; our struggle is with our spiritual opponents—Satan and his demons.

Paul exhorted his readers to put on the armor of God. As Paul wrote these words, he spent all of his time chained to a Roman guard. While Paul had the image of the soldier's armor in his mind, most of his readers were quite familiar with the armor of a Roman soldier. The reason for the armor was the enemy his readers faced. By the way, we face this enemy, also. The reason for putting on the armor was to "... Stand against the wiles of the devil." **Verse 11** The word here for wiles is the word from which we get our word methods. He is saying we need the armor to deal with the methods of the devil. There are several different names used for this enemy. Devil means accuser because he accuses God's people day and night. Satan means adversary because he is the enemy of God. He is also called the tempter, murderer, and liar. He is the enemy of God and man. He wants to get people to give up on God and to get God to give up on people. The latter will never happen; God will never give up on you.

Satan, the devil, the accuser, murderer, and liar, was a direct creation of God. He was not created this way, but he chose to rebel against God. You can read about this in Isaiah 14:12-15. His name was originally "Lucifer, son of the morning." **Isaiah 14:12** He was cast down because of his pride and desire to have God's throne. His helpers are found in this passage in Ephesians as "principalities...powers...rulers of the darkness of this

world...spiritual hosts of wickedness.” **Verse 12** This could be the group that was expelled with Satan when he was booted out of heaven, as seen in Revelation 12:4.

We are to take seriously the devil’s schemes and realize that God has given us what we need to stand against him. He desires to kill, steal, and destroy. However, we are overcomers through Jesus and the weaponry that He has provided for us. “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” **1 John 4:4**

Tomorrow, we will look at specific parts of the armor of God. Thank God for His provisions to win the battles we face!

Day 3– Read Ephesians 6:14-15

A soldier needs to be confident he or she is ready to go into battle and his or her weapons are effective for facing the enemy. God has provided believers with weaponry which should instill confidence within us that we can live well and stand firm against the enemy. Today, we will look at three of the weapons Paul wrote about in Ephesians 6.

The first piece of armor mentioned is a girdle or belt. It is called the girdle of truth. The armor of the Roman soldier included a girdle on which other parts of the weaponry were attached. This belt or girdle integrated other parts of the armor so the soldier had quick and easy access to the available weapons. This refers to integrity and faithfulness. Everything was right there, available and accessible to be used. This inspired confidence. The believer who is confident in the truth, knowing what they have and believe is pure and right, is equipped to face and refute the lies and schemes of the enemy.

The next piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was made of metal plates which covered the front and

back of the soldier from the neck to the waist. The believer finds security in knowing God has provided for righteousness (right standing) for the believer in Christ and that the believer who follows Christ can live a righteous life. The believer can be assured the righteousness God demands of us has been provided for us by God through Jesus' victory over the enemy. Nothing the enemy can do will take away the righteousness you have in Christ. This brings security.

The last piece of armor for today is the shoes of the gospel of peace. The Roman soldier wore sandals which had hobnails or cleats. These cleats allowed the soldier-warrior to gain a firm footing. It provided a way to stand without slipping. The literal translation is, "And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace of peace." Verse 15 In other words, the believer needs to know he has a firm place to stand. The believer has the good news of real salvation, salvation cannot be lost. This brings peace.

We have confidence based on truth. We have security based on the righteousness, we have which was given to us by Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. We have peace that salvation is real and cannot be lost. We should be confident warriors. The enemy may harass and aggravate, but he cannot undo what God has done for us and in us. Give thanks for what He has provided. Stand firm! This connects us to the salvation that God freely gave to us in Jesus.

Day 4– Read Ephesians 6:16

The last three parts of the armor are the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Today, we will look at these three pieces of the armor.

The shield of the Roman soldier was similiar to a door, 2 1/2 feet wide and 4 feet tall. It was made of wood, covered with linen and

leather to extinguish flaming arrows, and was held in front of the soldier, largely to provide for body protection. Our shield of faith gives us confidence that whatever the enemy shoots or throws our way, Jesus enables us to be kept safe from such attacks and to extinguish them. The shields also were made in such a way they could be connected, so that a whole line of soldiers could link their shields together. They would then move together like a solid wall, providing safety as they advanced. We are not in this battle alone. We need to be connected together for greater safety.

What the helmet provided is clear protection for the head. This applies more specifically to the mind. When Eve was attacked by the serpent in the garden, the attack was to her mind. The enemy played with her mind and caused her to turn away from what God had said, even to question what He said. The enemy wants to get our thinking off course from God's truth. The enemy uses people and programs in the hope of leading us to question what God has said. A grandmother told me this week about taking her grandchildren to see the Disney movie, "The Jungle Book." One of the children responded to a point in the movie where the panther says, "The elephants created the jungle." The child said, "That's not true!" I love it when even the kids can see through Hollywood's attempts to get us off track! Satan is not red and carrying a pitchfork around. He is subtle and seeks to gently lead us away from the truth (and the Truth). Put on the helmet of salvation and keep your mind safe from the enemy's lies.

The only offensive weapon in our arsenal is the sword, which is the Word of God. The Roman soldier was on the defense and was to stand against the enemy. Sometimes, he was compelled to go on the attack, so he also had a sword. The Word of God was God's method of creating; He spoke and things came into existence. The Word of God pierces the heart, so people are convicted and saved. Jesus used the Word of God against the enemy when He was being tempted. We use the Word of God to aggressively defeat lies. The

Word of God is the Truth and the only way to defeat lies is with the truth. David was speaking of himself, but the Spirit of God was telling us about Jesus. Keep on getting the dots connected!

I'll wrap this up with the words of Warren Wiersbe: "In one sense, the "whole armor of God" is a picture of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Truth (John 14:6), and He is our righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21) and our peace (Eph. 2:14). His faithfulness makes possible our faith (Gal. 2:20); He is our salvation (Luke 2:30); and He is the Word of God (John 1:1, 14). This means that when we trusted Christ, we received the armor. Paul told the Romans what to do with the armor (Rom. 13:11-14): wake up (Rom. 13:11), cast off sin, and "put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12). We do this by putting "on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14). By faith, put on the armor and trust God for the victory. Once and for all, we have put on the armor at the moment of salvation. But there must be a daily appropriation. When, King David put off his armor and returned to his palace, he was in greater danger than when he was on the battlefield (2 Sam. 11). We are never out of reach of Satan's devices, so we must never be without the whole armor of God."³

DAY 5– Read Psalm 69:19-25

When David was writing this psalm, he was certainly speaking of his own struggles. As is often the case, his words also spoke of the future, not just about his present circumstance. David expressed that his enemies had treated him so poorly he had actually become physically sick. There was no one to comfort him or take pity on him. We see the same with Jesus when He was praying in the garden, along with His own disciples who slept while He was "... Sorrowful and deeply distressed." **Matthew 26:37** David's lament points to Jesus and His experience of rejection and

³ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Expositin Commentary - New Testamnet, Volume 2

crucifixion. He, too, was given gall, a poisonous herb and vinegar.

Even Judas who betrayed Jesus was included in David's words. Peter quoted Psalm 69:25 in Acts 1:20 when he referenced Judas. Jesus was mocked and put to shame on the cross, with no one to come to His rescue. Even God, His Heavenly Father, forsook Him, because He had taken our sins on Himself.

The Bible is a single unit and it is made up of many different sections, accounts, and writings, but it is one unit that fits all together. Chuck Missler puts it this way: "The 66 books which we call the Bible constitute a highly integrated message system. What makes this so astonishing is the fact that they were penned by more than forty different people over a period of several thousand years! Yet we now discover that virtually every detail of the Biblical text evidences a highly skillful integrated design from cover to cover. In fact, every word, every place name, every detail was apparently placed there (in the original) deliberately as part of an overall intricate plan."

God inspired the Bible and we pick it up and read it today. Too often we fail to connect the dots, thereby missing the big picture. God has given us the big picture in many different biblical historical accounts. It all comes out in a tremendous way when we spend the time and effort to properly connect the dots.

WEEK 68 THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST

By Chris Watson

Jesus was humble and displayed that humility on the cross. He served many in His short time here on earth. Jesus was always looking out for the needs of others. He was always putting them first, mainly so He could point them to the Father and their need for salvation. Scripture tells us that God gives grace to the humble but resists the proud. This week, our scripture demonstrates how Jesus was and is the definition of humility.

Day 1– Read Philippians 2:1-4

Philippians 1:21 tell us “...To live is Christ and to die is gain.” Paul went on to speak of striving and suffering for Christ. In fact Paul says the suffering and strife the church at Philippi was facing, he had also faced.

Philippians 1:29 says, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” James 1:2 tells us whenever trouble comes our way, we are to let it be an opportunity for joy. Paul says that in suffering and in the good times, we are to be of one mind, being together in one accord. The way this can be accomplished is mentioned and spelled out in verses 3-4. Collectively, we cannot have selfish ambitions and still be united. We must all be humble and aware of the needs of others.

Jesus was healing and teaching so He could show and direct other people to God. Jesus wants us to take up our cross and follow Him. How are you doing this? Is your mind only on what you want and desire, or is it on Jesus? I admit there are times when I can become selfish and

seek to make things about me and only me, what about you? No matter what we face, we must realize it is not about us, but all about Him. Will you pray and commit to make it about Him and in making it about Him, will you serve others?

Day 2– Read Philippians 2:5-7

When we see the term bondservant, we usually have negative thoughts. However, when we understand this term, this is not always the case. When the word bondservant is used in the New Testament, it is used in the highest regards. It often speaks of believers who are under Christ's authority as His devoted followers. These are not believers which are servants against their will, but rather, believers who desire to walk with God and be under His guidance and authority.

When we read our text today referring to Jesus as taking the form of a bondservant, hopefully, we can see the meaning. Jesus Himself came to earth and became the bondservant of God. He came not to do His own will, but His Father's. We know this from all of scripture, but particularly when He was at the Mount of Olives and asked if this cup could pass from Him, then praying "...Nevertheless, not My will but Your will be done." **Luke 22:42**

Scripture also tells us Jesus came to serve. He did not come to be served. Jesus washed the disciple's feet, He healed the sick and broken, He forgave sins, and He met people in times of need. What about us? Are we about our Father's will or our own? Today, would you seek to be about His will and His alone? In doing so, we take on the very attributes of Jesus and become a servant ourselves.

Who can you serve today? Your spouse, parents, siblings,

friends or co-workers? Remember, it is not about you and me. It is ultimately about God and leading others to Him as we serve Him and serve others. Our mission as a church is to love Jesus and lead others to love Him, too. May this be our focus today.

Day 3– Read Philippians 2:8

Today, our scripture tells us Jesus was obedient even to death on the cross. It was no ordinary death, He died and bled for your sins and mine. **Romans 5:6-11** says, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Jesus, God’s Son, stepped out of heaven and came to our sinful world. God Himself came to earth to fix the problem we put ourselves in. If you have studied other religions, you learned that no other god has done this. First of all, they don’t exist, but for those who say they do, their gods are either high and mighty and can’t be known, or the god they serve and follow is dead! Praise the Lord our God is neither. He is definitely not dead and He is not only alive, He is a personal God who came to this world to save us so we can have a relationship with Him.

Take some time to simply give thanks and adore God this morning. During the next few minutes, don't bring any requests to God, but rather thank Him for who He is and what He has done. Thank Him that He continues to be in your life. Spend time being thankful and grateful to your Savior.

Day 4– Read Philippians 2:9-11

You may know this song and it comes to mind as part of today's devotions. Here are just a few of the words:

*Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God
Come
One day every tongue will confess You are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those,
Who gladly choose you now⁴*

Jesus was obedient to His Father and today's scripture says that God highly exalted Him. Jesus is the name that is above all other names. Think of the names of all the people you know. Now think of the names of the people in our country and world who may be worth a lot of money and who may have a great deal of power. These names don't come close to the name of Jesus. No amount of money or power can come close to the name of Jesus.

Verse 10 tells us that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow in heaven, on the earth and under the earth. This would

⁴ Come Now is the Time to Worship, Brian Doerksen

mean everyone from the beginning of time who has ever lived and will ever live. Every knee will one day bow to Jesus. This includes atheists, agnostics, those who follow no god and those who follow false gods as well as Christians. However, look back at the song from this morning. It says the greatest joy is for those who gladly bow to Jesus now. Those who willingly love and bow to Jesus now will also bow to Him in the future, in heaven. We can worship Him, love Him, and be loved by Him now and in heaven, void of all sin.

Today, would you thank God that you know Him? Would you pray by name for those you know who do not know Him? Ask how God would have you love them and share about Jesus so they, too, can know Him?

Day 5– Read Psalm 103:8-18

What a wonderful Psalm we read today. David speaks such wonderful and true words. We need to remember these words were spoken before Jesus came to earth. Verse 8 tells us the Lord is merciful and gracious. God desires for all to come to repentance, He wants all people to follow and know Him. **Verse 10** is one of my favorite verses, “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.” Praise the Lord! What if God gave us what we deserved? We know we would get death which is eternity apart from Him. What if He wasn’t merciful and loving? Thankfully, He has forgiven us and has cast our sins as far as the east is from the west.

Read Verse 17 again. What a great promise! The mercy of the Lord is everlasting to those who know and fear the Lord. Does this mean that after salvation we are perfect? Absolutely not, we mess up and sin. While it is not an excuse to continue in sin, as Paul tells us in Romans, we

know God loves and forgives us. God is merciful to us as we walk with Him day in and day out. Daily, we can know Him more, revere Him more, and should desire to obey Him more.

Use the rest of your time this morning for two things:

1) Thank the Lord for His mercy, grace and how He has saved you. 2) Pray that you would follow God more today than yesterday, and you would hear His voice and obey it.

WEEK 69 KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

By Dennis Watson

Up through Acts 7, the gospel was only for the Jews and those who had become Jewish converts. But when Paul began his ministry, the gospel went to the gentiles, also. This change came about in Acts 10. Many of the Jews believed that for a gentile to be saved, they must first become a Jew. The Jews were outraged and called Paul to give an account and an answer for his activity among the gentiles. It appeared to be settled, but everywhere Paul went, he encountered Judaizers. Judaizers were Jews who mixed grace and law together. They demanded the gentiles must adhere to certain Jewish laws and customs to become Christians. Paul addressed this in Galatians, but also in our passages this week.

Day 1– Read Philippians 3:1-6

Paul introduces what he is about to say with the words, “Rejoice in the Lord.” He is about to share with them that he has come to the point of a new value system. What he once valued highly, he now counts as loss. He looked back on his life, at the past, and shared what was once his source of confidence.

He gives a warning in **Verse 2** about what he calls, “Beware of dogs...evil workers...and the mutilation.” He is warning about Jews who wanted to place law demands on gentiles who were becoming believers in Jesus. This would rob new believers of their joy and confidence in Jesus alone. The Jews, up until the time of Paul’s writings, were still bogged down in behavior and following the law. For this reason, they thought it their responsibility to impose the same on new believers.

Paul makes the distinction in **Verse 3** saying, “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” He elaborates at this point saying that if anyone had a reason to have confidence in the flesh, it was him. Then he tells of the things he once counted as the source of his confidence. His parents had him circumcised on the eighth day according to the law. He was a pure-bred Jew unlike the Samaritans. He came from the best family line—that of Benjamin who was the favorite son of Jacob. He was a leader of the Hebrews regarding their religion. He was also a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a religious-political group with the intent of establishing the kingdom. Paul was, in every way, on top of the world when it came to the flesh. If anyone could feel good about their accomplishments and standing in life, it was Paul. It did not stop there. He was standing firm for Judaism and standing against believers in Jesus by persecuting the church. But with his new value system, he said he did not count these things as gain or advantage, but loss.

I have at times thought of myself as being advantaged: an American citizen, pastor of a great church, husband, father and so forth. Any confidence in the flesh is NOTHING! It is of no advantage. We cannot possess or gain anything in this world which will move us toward perfection because in this world, we will not gain perfection by our works, achievements or acclaim received!

This is the point Paul is making and he will look at the new value system in the verses which follow. We will look at these tomorrow. Right now, realize that any achievement you have in this life will not have an eternal impact. You need to cling to the new value system.

Day 2– Read Philippians 3:7-8

At one time in his life Paul, like most of the Jews of his day, thought of themselves as perfect. They had kept the laws and customs. They were born into the right family lines. All was good! For Paul, his eyes were opened and he saw himself as he really was—a sinner. Remember it was Paul who wrote, “All have sinned.” **Romans 3:23** He also wrote, “The wages of sin is death.” **Romans 6:23** Paul came to a new value system that did not originate with his works of performance. He begins Verse 7 with the coordinating conjunction *but*. Paul now makes a distinction between what he once counted as gain, or advantage, and what he *now* counts as gain, or advantage. He has a new value system. Remember the things he once counted as gain—his birth, his law keeping, his position as a Pharisee.

Now those things are loss to him because his new value system is a righteousness which comes through Jesus as a gift. The things he now considers loss were things he achieved or which came to him by way of birth. Jews believed they could actually earn their way into heaven through keeping the law. Paul came to realize our good works really are just like trash. This is not to say that doing good is bad but doing good to be made right in God’s eyes is no good; it does not work. No one is good enough to go to heaven. No one is good enough on their own to have a relationship with God. This is why Paul counted those things as loss. He now knew the truth about Jesus, but not just conversion, he now valued having an ongoing, life-changing, eternity-transforming relationship with Jesus. I like the way J. Vernon McGee puts it: "Paul’s conversion was not just an experience of a moment. Conversion is not a balloon ascension. A great many people think that you can go down to some altar and have

an experience, see a vision, and be carried to the heights -- and that's it. Oh, my friend, conversion is something that stays with you. It is not for just a moment. Although it happens in a moment of time, it continues for a lifetime. And sanctification is not a great emotional experience; it is a daily walk in dependence upon God."⁵

When Paul met Jesus, he lost his religion. Maybe you need to lose yours. Jesus came not for religion, but for relationships. Don't let anyone tell you it is about doing. No, it is about being—being a child of the King.

Day 3– Read Philippians 3:8-11

Paul became a child of God through Jesus on the Damascus Road. He was a changed man. When he met Jesus, he lost his religion. The things he once counted gain, he now counted loss. He had a new value system. He now valued knowing Jesus. Why is knowing Jesus so important? Jesus lived a perfect life. He did what no human could ever do. He did not sin yet He became sin for us. If we come to know Jesus, we can experience a change of life because of His death and resurrection. We can exchange our unrighteousness for His righteousness. To be righteous is to be made right. I'm right sometimes, but for the most part, I am not. I cannot achieve the righteous or righteousness which God demands. Scripture says, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags"

Isaiah 64:6. which is what Paul was saying about his religious achievements. He called them rubbish. Since today is the third day of the week, we will connect the week's passage to the gospel. The gospel is the good news

⁵ Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee

of Jesus coming to die for our sins so we can be forgiven and have an eternal relationship with the God of the universe. We cannot attain or achieve righteousness or right standing with God by our works. This is what Paul meant when he said, “Not having a righteousness of my own, which is from the law.” **Verse 9** It is a righteousness which is from God by faith! Totally the work of God through His work accomplished through His Son, Jesus, at the cross! Our works play no part! This is the gospel connection. Salvation is a work of God and it is appropriated or received by faith. We can add nothing to it nor take anything away from it.

Paul was a man who in this life had achieved much, however, he came to know the truth; real lasting value is not achieved, but received by faith in the work of God through Jesus. Have you received His gift? If so, rejoice in Him!

Day 4– Read Philippians 3:12-17

Paul was an ambitious man. He was as a lost Jew and he still was as a believer. He said he wanted to know the power of resurrection and attain the resurrection. He spoke of the power of the resurrection in the believer’s life. The power of the resurrection is not only the resurrection at the end of all things here on earth as we know it, it is also the day-to-day power to conquer and overcome those things which would defeat believers and leave them powerless. We are not powerless; we are power-filled.

In Verses 12-13a, Paul revealed something all believers should have: divine dissatisfaction. Paul realized that although he was saved, he had a long way to go. He was not perfect and he would not be as long as he was living in this flesh existence. I

put it this way, “I am not perfect, but I am in hot pursuit of the One who is.” I am satisfied with Jesus but I am not with my own place and growth. Like Paul, I want more of His resurrection power in me. Do you have spiritual dissatisfaction to the point you are satisfied with Jesus, but you want more of Him and His power in you?

This dissatisfaction resulted in Paul *pressing on* and *reaching forward to those things ahead*. Paul’s dissatisfaction caused him to *press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus had taken hold of him*. What a great mental image. Paul was seeking, in every way he could, to discover and experience what God had in store for him. How sad to miss out on God’s best. Every believer should be seeking to know and experience the best of what God has for them. Like Paul, I don’t want to miss out.

Have you ever had dissatisfaction in your spiritual life? I am confident we all have. Some people get discouraged and even want to give up. Giving up is not the cure. The cure is to follow Paul’s example. He did not get down for where he was spiritually, instead he was determined to press on and seek God’s best, no matter the cost. Will you press on? Will you turn dissatisfaction into hunger for the Lord?

Day 5– Read Psalm 34:1-8

Day 5 each week, we look at a passage from the Psalms or Old Testament prophets to see what we can learn about Jesus or the gospel. Today, we will look at Psalm 34:1-8. This is a prayer David sang to God. He was inviting everyone to join in this song of praise to God. In **Psalm 34:3**, David writes, “Oh, magnify the Lord with me.” He wanted everyone to experience the joy, the blessings, and trusting the Lord. David knew the real joy and confidence

in this life comes from the Lord God.

Several times David spent time running for his life because of the jealous rage of King Saul. Saul was pursuing David, seeking to kill him. On one occasion, David pretended to be insane to escape Abimelech. It was after the escape when David wrote this psalm.

I love the way he begins it. He was determined to praise the Lord and bless Him all of the time. I am not convinced that's the way he felt all of the time, but he chose not to be governed by how he felt. He was going to choose to praise the Lord all of the time rather than be beaten down by his circumstances. He knew God was always faithful no matter what the circumstances were and he chose to set his mood with praise and blessing of the Lord. David praised God for answering his prayers and delivering him from his fears.

The taste of food has memory. A few years ago, I lost my sense of smell and with it, much of the taste of food became just a memory. However, things do not seem to taste as good as they once did; I associate it with texture and the memory of the taste. I remember how good it used to taste, so I can enjoy it up to a point. David had trusted the Lord and knew that He was faithful because he had tasted the Lord's goodness and remembered His faithfulness. Try Him by trusting Him and see that He is good. Trusting Him will become one of those good habits you will find leaves a good taste in your mouth. David invites us to join in praising and exalting the Lord. He wants us all to enjoy His faithfulness and goodness. Are you enjoying His faithfulness? Give praise to Him and invite others to join you!

WEEK 70 CHARACTER COUNTS

By Chris Watson

It's been said that character is the way a person thinks, feels and behaves. This is not a perfect definition, but it helps us see that our character makes us who we are. God does the work, but the way we think and then carry out action really shows what's in our hearts and minds. What does your character, that which you think and do, say about you?

Day 1– Read Acts 16:1-5

It's always important when reading a passage to see what comes before and after it. Sometimes it is also helpful to cross reference or know of other books that speak of the same people or situations in which you are reading. We will jump into 1 and 2 Timothy this week. Our passage today mentions Timothy and how Paul wanted Timothy to join him in sharing the gospel. It is likely that Lois, Eunice, and possibly Timothy, became believers on Paul's first missionary journey.

As we are introduced to Timothy in today's passage, note what **2 Timothy 1: 3-5** says, "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also." Paul is thankful for the genuine faith in Timothy, but he also mentions Eunice, Timothy's mother, and Lois, Timothy's grandmother. Timothy had a godly heritage. He had modeled for him the truth of Jesus

and the way in which to go. Because of this, Timothy was a strong believer and God used Him greatly.

You may or may not have had Godly parents and grandparents. If you did, thank God for your godly heritage. Thank Him for those in your family which modeled Christ and led you to Him. I am so thankful both sets of my grandparents were believers and my mom and dad passed on to us the truth of Jesus. They saw to it that we heard the truth daily and, praise the Lord, God saved us. If you have such a Godly heritage, rejoice and be thankful today.

You may not have this type of heritage and if not, what an opportunity. Maybe your parents and/or grandparents didn't teach you about God or the things of God. Maybe they taught you, but it was not modeled. If not, why not begin now? Why not say, "It begins with me?" Be thankful what God has taught you over the years. If you were not raised in a Christian environment, you may have different ways of seeing things that others don't see and those ways can often be helpful. In other words, we all bring something to the table.

Whether or not we were raised with a godly worldview, it is up to us to keep that godly worldview and live by it. We can't change our past, we can't go back, however, we have today. What are you living, sharing, and passing on? Maybe some can say of us that they not only remember our children's faith, but the faith of their parents and grandparents. Continue to pass it on or begin today.

Day 2– Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7

In today's passage, we see the qualifications of an overseer. An overseer can be a pastor or a minister, full or part time,

bi-vocational or volunteer. As a pastor, God has called us to teach and instruct the Word of God (verse 2) as our main focus. There are many responsibilities of a pastor, but our main goal is to share the truth of God's Word.

One can't take care of the church of God if he can not take care of himself and his family. We are to lead and rule with the help of our spouse over our house/family. This is also good advice for anyone wanting to serve. In order to be an effective pastor or volunteer, we must first be able to lead our family.

Two of the greatest downfalls for anyone are pride and temptation. The same is true for a leader/pastor. When things are going well for a pastor and he is not carefully in tune with God, he may have the tendency to take the credit for himself, becoming prideful in what he has done. Scripture tells us if there is any good, it comes from the Lord, not from any man.

Another downfall is letting our guard down. It can happen to anyone. When it happens to pastors, we often hear it on the news or words get out into the community and the effects are devastating. As a pastor, I nor any other pastor, can afford to be foolish or give into temptation. We are tempted just like everyone else, but we must fight off the temptation with God and His Truth.

Would you pray for your pastors today? Would you pray we would continue well and run the race, continuing until God says otherwise?

Would you pray that God would continue to raise up mighty men of God to preach His truth? Here are the names of your pastors, so you can pray for each one of

them by name:

Dennis Watson
Ken Helms
Keith Turner
Jake Farrell

Paul Allen
Steve Owens
Chris Watson
Marcus Byne

Day 3– Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Acts 6:1-4 says, “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’” This verse tells us exactly why deacons were put into place. The disciples still wanted to convey the Word of God everywhere and, at the same time, wanted to make sure the needs of God’s Church, in this case the widows, were being met. The role of a deacon is to help take care of the needs of the people in God’s Church so the pastors can teach and preach the Word. This does not mean the pastors have the deacons to do all the work, but the deacons are to come alongside the Pastors and help shoulder the load.

In our passage today, Paul goes on to give the qualifications of a deacon. The qualifications of a deacon are similar to that of a pastor and, yet, different. Look again at our verses yesterday and compare the two. We also read that deacons’ wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, and faithful in all things. We understand that while the deacon’s role in the church is important, so is his spouse’s role as she

is his help and support.

The role of godly men, particularly deacons, are important in God's Church. Both of our campuses have deacons with whom things are shared, prayed over, and who help carry the load. We are always asking how we can better serve and help. Do you know of someone who would be a good deacon? Reread the qualifications, does someone come to mind? If so, inquire about getting a deacon packet and passing it on to them, asking if they would prayerfully consider becoming a deacon. We are all in this together as we seek to share the Gospel and serve God's Church. Pray for your deacons and the leaders in your Church today.

Day 4– Read 1 Timothy 3:14-16

The church is God's plan, He had it in mind before the beginning of time. Matthew 16:18 tells us God would build His Church. Can you think of any other institution or organization which has lasted over 2000 years? Other than the church, there are none because the church was God's idea and it will continue on until the end.

In Verse 15 of today's passage, we are told the Church is the pillar and ground of truth. We know from scripture the church is God's bride and the church is all of the believers. It is not a building or a place, but it is the people who make up the church. Many of Paul's writings were to either encourage the church or to question and help it get back on track with what God wanted.

If the church is to be the pillar and ground of truth, we need to confess Jesus as our Savior and gather with other believers to worship and be encouraged in the faith. If the church is the pillar and ground of truth, then we must not

only stand for truth, but live that same truth. Paul knew the importance of writing all of this in his letters to the church.

Ask yourself, "If every believer walked with God the way I do, how would the church function?" Answer it honestly. We all need to do better in our walk with God. We should say "Jesus, I want to be your follower and be part of your church the way You intended. I want to do my part and follow You with all I have."

Pray for God's Church today, wherever it is gathered or scattered. Pray not only for Harp's Hollonville and Fayetteville, but for the church across the world. In praying, ask the Lord how you can commit to His Church and His plan. There is not enough space here, but end your devotion today by reading something I wrote a few years ago. <http://justwhatiamlearning.blogspot.com/2016/08/that-which-grieves-me.html> - "That which grieves me"

Take this opportunity to commit to love and be in and a part of God's Church regularly.

Day 5– Read Psalm 144

Psalm 46 tells us "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." **Proverbs 18:10** tell us, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are safe." Today's Psalm also reminds us God leads and guides us and He is who we really need.

Several years ago, at the Hollonville Campus, we read through a book on Wednesday evenings titled Praying the Bible, by Donald Whitney. It was a short book and I would

HIGHLY recommend it. It teaches how to pray the Bible, specifically the Book of Psalms. I would like to challenge you today to either take today's scripture verse by verse or several verses, and pray them. It may go something like this for Verse 13, "God thank You that You are my provider, thank You for my job, and thank You for the ability to work. Please continue to provide as You have in the past. Provide for me and my family. Not only for me and my family, but provide so that I can provide for others who may have needs so they may be drawn to You. Thank You, God that You are my ultimate provider."

Do this exercise with the entire chapter. Some verses will be easier than others, but I think you will find this exercise very useful and realize how much we have to be thankful for.

WEEK 71 GOD BREATHED THE SCRIPTURES

By Dennis Watson

Where would we be without the Word of God? The Word of God comes to us in two forms: the living Word which is Jesus and the written Word which is about Jesus and points us to Jesus. This week, we look at Paul's words to Timothy as he encourages him to get about the work God has fit and furnished for him. We will see that Timothy had been taught the Word from his youth and Paul had been an example and mentor to him. Think about those who have taught and mentored you. Then get about what He has for you to do.

Day 1– Read 2 Timothy 3:1-9

What a powerful and clear warning we have in today's passage. The danger of loving something other than God will lead to departure from the truth and rebellion. Paul said that in the last days, people would be "... Lovers of themselves...lovers of money...and lovers of pleasure."

Verses 2 and 4 Jesus said you cannot serve two masters because you will hate one and love the other. *The last days* began with the ministry of Jesus and will continue until He returns.

Paul is writing to young Timothy telling him how to respond in the difficult time which will characterize the last days. In this chapter, he is talking about knowledge and responsibility. Regarding the nature of the last days, Paul listed eighteen characteristics which we see all around us. The fact that the family is in great distress today is all around us. People love themselves. People hate other people and live lives which are characterized by no self-control. Even among church people there are people who go through the motion; "Having a form of godliness but denying its power" **Verse 5**, where professing

believers live lives which include these characteristics. People who fall into this trap of rebellion and disobedience are those who resist the truth. When a person turns away from the truth and the knowledge of the truth, they are subject to all kinds of perversion.

The more we fail to love God, the more sin proliferates; it is part of that one step followed by more and more. When a person takes one step away from the truth and fails to repent and return, they are on a dangerous road which will take them to levels of perversion they could never imagine. It all begins with being lovers of things other than God. Look around you. We are indeed living in perilous times. On the one hand, it is encouraging because the Bible tells us this would happen, however, it is very difficult because we see friends, family members and co-workers falling into the trap of the enemy. The solution is the truth of God. The truth of the Word needs to abide in us and we need to abide in the Word. Be aware, the enemy wants to trip you up. Do not depart from the Word of God to the right or to the left. If you have, return now!

Day 2– Read 2 Timothy 3:10-15

There is a contrast beginning with these words with what happened before. In contrast to the apostasy of many in the last days, Timothy had godly examples and teaching. His mother Eunice and grandmother Lois had taught him as a child the Word of God. As a result of their instruction from the Word of God, Timothy had come to salvation. He also had the example of Paul. He knew of Paul's faithfulness even in the midst of suffering and persecution. He had Paul as an example of staying in the battle no matter what came his way. Paul was encouraging Timothy to choose his heroes wisely and I believe Paul was telling Timothy to follow his example.

Was it haughty or arrogant for Paul to make such a claim? No! All of us should do like Paul and live our lives in such a way as to say, “Follow my example!” Paul wanted Timothy to stay faithful to what he had learned as a child regarding the Word of God and to follow his own example of ministry and service to the Lord and His church.

Soon after I came to Harp’s Crossing, back in the early 1980’s, I set out on a journey to make sure my faith was my own. I had been taught the Bible, like Timothy, as a young child. I had grown up in a strong Bible believing church. There were examples of spiritual heroes I could look up to and follow their example, but I needed to know that I had not just inherited my faith, but I had to own it for myself. After all, I was now the pastor of a church! I set out to make sure that what I had learned as a child and even a young adult corresponded to what I observed in the world. That is not to say faith is not necessary, but I came to see and continue to see that what I find in the Bible best corresponds to the reality I see. It makes sense even from a faith perspective.

In this week’s passage Paul admonishing Timothy to bolster him self up in the truth because he had a task to do. Paul wanted Timothy to stick to what he knew to be true. He wanted him to not give up but to keep on going in light of the instructions and examples he had. Paul wanted Timothy to stay on track.

What do you need to do to bolster your faith? Are you digging into the Word? Have you remained true to what the Lord has taught you in the past? Have you wisely chosen your spiritual heroes?

Day 3– Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I have heard and read this quote from many sources: “The Bible is just a book written by men.” It is a book and men were involved in its writing. However, the Bible is a miraculous book and it was inspired by God. This phrase means the Bible was God-breathed. It was written by men but they wrote it as God breathed it. The Holy Spirit used men of God to write the Word of God (see 2 Peter 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit did not remove the natural characteristics of the writers. God, in His plan, prepared the writers. Each writer has his own unique style and vocabulary. In each case, the writers were dealing with special circumstances in which God spoke to them inspiring them what to write. God used the writers to speak according to His instruction about the historical setting and what He had to reveal about it.

To speak of biblical inspiration is to speak of the supernatural influence the Holy Spirit had on the writers of the Bible. The word revelation is the fact of God communicating truth to man. The inspired Word of God is the revealing of God and His plan and purpose for His creation. It is completely reliable. God is faithful and if He has a Word it would have to be like Him, perfect and beyond adequate.

Paul tells Timothy the Word of God is for the man or person of God. Any man or woman who is a child of God can be used by God. This is accomplished by reading, studying and living according to the Word of God. For this purpose, the Word of God is *profitable*. It is profitable for *doctrine* which has to do with what is right. We learn what is right from God’s Word. It is profitable for *reproof* which has to do with pointing out what is not right. It is also profitable for *correction* which is how to get right. Lastly, Paul says it is profitable for *instruction in righteousness* which has to do with staying right. Paul points

out that all of this is so the person of God can be complete and equipped for every good work. Complete means in fit shape or in fit condition; it is being fitted for use. Fully equipped means the person of God has been given what they need to serve Him.

Timothy was a young leader and he was an instrument of God used to minister and serve others with the Word of God. He had been blessed with a godly mother and grandmother and he had been blessed to have been mentored by Paul. He had the richness of God's teaching in the Word. He was, through all of this, being made fit for every good work which God had in store for Him. He has been preparing you to be a man or woman of God. He has placed spiritual heroes in your life. He has given you teachers and mentors. Perhaps you need to take a few minutes to text, email, write or call someone who has had a spiritual influence in your life. Take the time to say thank you for allowing God to work through them in your life. Also, continue to dig into God's Word so you will be fit and equipped to be used by Him in the lives of others.

Day 4– Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Did you spend some time yesterday thinking about the people who first planted the truth of the gospel in you? Did you reflect on spiritual heroes who were instrumental in your growth as a believer? After Paul told Timothy about how God had worked in his life, he then laid down a huge challenge. It was actually more than a challenge it was a charge. Paul charged Timothy to a task. Soldiers have a charge to defend the country. Police officers are charged to protect citizens. Both soldiers and police officers carry out their charge at the peril of loss of life. The word therefore in Verse 1 connects what comes next to what happened in Chapter 3. Therefore, since God had given His Word and example, Paul charged Timothy to preach the

Word. Timothy had been made complete and thoroughly equipped for this task so Paul is telling him to get about the work God has fit him for.

What about you? Hasn't God been working in your life? He has taught you and He has given you spiritual heroes and examples of faithful people who have fought the fight of faith. What you do with it is a stewardship. Timothy was to preach and he was to do it when times were good and when times were bad. He was to do it even when it brought suffering. He was to be ready to herald the word at any time and under any circumstance.

All believers have been called to serve and be on mission. Before you cop out and say, "Well, I'm not a preacher," remember what Timothy was to do, we are all to do—herald or announce the Word. This was what Jesus told His followers in the Great Commission and what He sent the Holy Spirit for at Pentecost. We are to be stewards of the Word and the workings God has been doing in our lives. We are, like Paul said, to be ready. Not to stand down but to always be on standby. We are to announce it when we want to and when we don't, when it is convenient and when it is not, when it is easy and when it is difficult. This is what he meant when he said, "Be ready in season and out of season." **Verse 2**

Paul warns Timothy that future times will come when people will not put up with the teaching of the truth and when these times come, we are still to announce the truth.

You have been taught the Word of God. You have examples of godliness in your life now and in the past. Now, go announce to the world the good news of Jesus. Be ready and do it.

Day 5– Read Isaiah 59:12-21

This is the day we look at a psalm or a passage from one of the prophets to connect the dots to Jesus and the gospel. Most all of the prophets spoke of a coming redeemer, deliverer, or the Messiah. They did so with anticipation. We are blessed to have this perspective to look and see those prophecies and see how they have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Most people, at least in some way, know that they are sinful. It seems people feel guilty as if something is just not right. This is true and the problem is spelled out in these verses, “Our sins testify against us.” **Verse 12** Not only are we aware of it, but the Lord looks and sees and knows that there is no one to deliver. There was no intercessor; there was no one to deal with the injustice. Israel had no way of helping herself.

This is the true reality in all times. No one can save or deliver themselves. We cannot fix the problem of sin and accompanying guilt. Only God can forgive sin and change a person’s heart. It is in God’s power that salvation comes. He intercedes to fight for His people and defeat their enemies. God takes vengeance. The Lord Himself will send His Messiah, the deliverer, to Zion which is Jerusalem.

When He speaks of the covenant in Verse 21, He is speaking of the new covenant which He will make and ratify with Jesus, His own Son’s death and resurrection. He will pour out His Spirit and all will have access to the forgiveness of sin which is made available only through Jesus.

Sin is not a new or modern concept. It has been around since Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Every person and every nation since has been plagued by sin. God has taken the initiative to tell us His plan and then to bring His plan to us in

the person of Jesus Christ, His Messiah. Give thanks for what He has done and realize only He can take away your sin and guilt.

WEEK 72 THE HEART'S DESIRES

By Chris Watson

What really is our heart's desire? If we are honest, we would have to say our hearts are selfish, prideful, hateful and full of bitterness, and anger,. We can't fix our own heart, only God can. Scripture reminds us that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. Sometimes, I do well with this and sometimes, not so much. What about you? This week we will look at the heart's desires.

Day 1– Read James 4:1-2

Hopefully, we can all learn something from James, particularly these first two verses. The main key which causes the wars and fights among believers, is mentioned in **Verse 1** “Do they not come from your desires of pleasure that battle within you?” Many arguments happen because of what we want. I want it done my way, my time, I know best, or I have done this before so they need to listen to me. In the end, our fighting is often brought on by our selfishness. It becomes all about us and what we want. Sometimes wars and fights happen from miscommunication but often it's just plain selfishness.

Thinking back on your week, did you have any disagreements? If you are honest, were you at fault? Did you want your way? “Often we veil our religious quarrels under the disguise of ‘spir ituality.’ We are like Miriam and Aaron, who complained about Moses’ wife, but who really were envious of Moses’ authority (Num. 12). Or we imitate James and John, who asked for special thrones in the kingdom, when what they really wanted was recog nition today (Mark 10:35–45). In both of these instances, the result of selfish desire was chastening and division among God’s people. Miriam’s sin halted the progress of Israel for a whole week! Selfish desires

are dangerous things. They lead to wrong actions (“ye kill, ye fight and war,” James 4:2), and they even lead to wrong praying (“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures,” James 4:3 NIV). When our praying is wrong, our whole Christian life is wrong. People who are at war with themselves because of selfish desires are always unhappy people. They never enjoy life. Instead of being thankful for the blessings they do have, they complain about the blessings they do not have. They cannot get along with other people because they are always envying others for what they have and do. They are always looking for that ‘magic something’ that will change their lives, when the real problem is within their own hearts.”⁶

This passage got to me, how about you? I don’t want to be selfish, I don’t want it to be about me. Even when I am standing on truth with another believer, I can do so lovingly and in a kind spirit, I don’t need to be mean spirited and begin a fight.

Verse 2 ends with, “... yet, you do not have because you do not ask.” This helps us see that often our focus is on us. Instead of praying to God, we try to figure it out on our own. Instead of seeking Him to see if we could be in the wrong or how to deal with a situation, we take it into our own hands. Also, if a person is full of lust, hate or meanness, it is truly hard to actively pray and seek God. How are things going with you? Do you seek God when trying to make decisions? Do you seek Him when conflicts arise? Do you want your plan or His and are you seeking Him in those plans? Remember it is not about you or me, it is about Him. If we are going to share the Gospel with the

⁶ James, Warren Wiersbe

world then we must spend less time on our sinful desires or getting our way and more in walking with God and sharing His truth.

Day 2– Read James 4:3-5

When I read today’s passage, the vision which comes to my mind is someone literally sitting on a fence with one leg hanging on one side and one leg on the other side. James says we are not to do this and he makes it quite clear. He also tells us when we say we are a follower of Christ and yet we enjoy the evils of this world, we are like an unfaithful wife who loves her husband's enemies.

Have you ever found yourself trying to be a friend of the world and a friend of God? We obviously live in this world, work in this world, play in this world, and raise a family in this world. The world itself isn’t bad, it’s the sin in this world that makes it bad. James says we can’t be a friend of sin and a friend of God. In fact, if one wants to be a friend of this world, by default, they become an enemy of God. Romans 5:10 tells us that before we trusted in Christ, we were enemies of God.

As believers, we try to justify our sins by saying, “Well, I am not doing that” or “At least I am not like them.” In our minds, we often rate sin and sometimes we even rate it out loud. God does not, sin is sin. Murder is a sin just like hate and stealing are sins, and just like gossip and lying. Believers, as Christ followers, can’t seek to know and walk with God and yet have ungodliness in their hearts, even if we think we are justified (which we are not).

Who are you a friend of? Have you given your life to Christ? If so, are you straddling the fence? It cannot be

done. In doing so, others around you will clearly see it and to the unbelievers, it is a stumbling block. We must pick a side like Joshua did. Joshua gathered the 12 tribes of Israel and told them that they must decide who they would serve. **Joshua 24:14-15** says, “Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

We must choose whom we will serve. Today, will you draw a line in the sand and decide to trust the Lord with your life and recommit to serve the Lord your God?

Day 3– Read James 4:6-10

In our first day in James, we read about selfishness and pride which causes fighting and quarrels. Yesterday, we read if we want a closer walk with God, we have to give up our worldly ways. Three words

stick out from today’s passage: be humble, submit, and cleanse. These three words will help lead us in our walk with God and being in peace with others.

Jesus was the perfect example of showing humility to us all. Humility is exactly what Jesus was. It’s been said that pride is the opposite of humility. Humility is not thinking low of yourself and it’s not seeking to put ourselves down, however, it’s having a right perspective on God which then gives us a right perspective on our own importance.

The word submit means we are not our own. In 1 Corinthians 6:20 Paul tells us we have been bought with a price. When I trusted Jesus and committed to follow Him, I was pushing my desires away and letting His take over. Too often I submit to what I want instead of what God wants. How about you? James tells us to submit to God, and to let Him take over and command. He will lead us and He will help us to resist the devil.

Only God can cleanse us. We were cleansed when we trusted Him to take away our sins. Often our heart gets dirty and we need God to wash it clean. This is not to get saved again in regards to regeneration, but being saved from ourselves daily and many times throughout the day. God must regularly cleanse our heart. We must recognize we need it and ask Him to make us clean.

Humility, submission and cleanse. These three words should be the essence of the believer's life. Just imagine if you humbled yourself before God and others, submitting to what He wants, and when falling short, asking Him to cleanse you from going the wrong way? What if this was our way of living? Is it yours? Ask God to humble you as you submit to Him and have Him cleanse you all throughout the day.

Day 4– Read James 4:11-17

Some have described sin as either being sin of commission or sin of omission. A sin of commission is where we knowingly do something wrong, whether in our thoughts or in our actions. However a sin of omission is refusing to do something we know God would have us do. This could be something we find in God's Word or something that God speaks to us specifically about. In **Verse 17**, James

says, “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” An example of this may be the Lord has told you to go and visit the person down the street and check on them. You don’t know if they are lonely or maybe there is something that you can help with, but you know the Lord has told you to go. If you don’t go, you are disobeying and this would be a sin of omission.

James reminds us we are to obey what the Lord tells us. What has He spoken to you about that you know you are supposed to do, but you keep putting off? It may be something you need to do and you know it is the Lord’s will, but do you keep dragging your feet? Don’t continue in sin, but obey and allow the Lord to use you.

Day 5– Read Psalm 22:7-8

Verse 8 parallels what is written in **Matthew 27:43**, “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now.” Psalm 22 speaks of the *suffering, praise and posterity of the Messiah*. (be reminded this was hundreds of years before Jesus, the Messiah, would come).

We know from reading the Gospels that people ridiculed, laughed, mocked and spat on Jesus. The people leading this charge were the religious leaders. Can you imagine what that must have been like for Jesus? Being the Son of God and knowing what was to come, but at the same time having people turn on you must have been difficult. Jesus knew God would rescue Him in His own time. He would first have to die for the sins of the world, be buried, and He would rise again on the 3rd day.

The Lord did rescue Jesus, but not as those who helped put Him to death were thinking He would. God’ not only rescued

Jesus, but rescued us all at the same time. He rescued Jesus from death and the grave and He rescued us from the same thing. We will experience physical death, but not spiritual death and we will live eternally with Jesus. The words written in Matthew 27 are the same words in our scripture today, written long before the death of Jesus Christ.

God is good. He is our ultimate rescuer. He loves us and desires us to know and walk with Him daily. Do you know Him? Has He rescued you from your sins? If so, thank Him for the rescuing that only He could offer.

WEEK 73 BORN AGAIN!

By Dennis Watson

The first century believers went through incredible persecution and rejection. We can only imagine what it was like for them as they were used of God to blase and prepare the way for the gospel to come to generations, all the way to us. Peter was writing to give encouragement to those first century believers. The fledgling church needed guidance and encouragement. They needed to know that God was at work in them and through them and they needed to be reminded that God was the One who kept them and He had this.

Day 1– Read 1 Peter 1:1-2

Under the inspiration and the breathing of God, through the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter wrote 1 Peter. He did so to encourage the believers who lived in the region which is known today as Northern Turkey.

Peter identified himself. His Greek name is Peter and in Aramaic it is Cephas; both mean rock. Peter was the rock according to Jesus, describing his faith when he made his confession of Jesus as, “...The Christ the Son of the living God.” **Matthew 16:16**

He is writing to people he calls pilgrims who have been scattered (the Dispersion) across what is Northern Turkey today. They were probably scattered because of the persecution which came to believers in the first century. He called them pilgrims because this world is not the permanent home of believers. Look at these two passages that help us understand this idea:

“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from

the fleshly lusts which war against the soul." **1 Peter 2:11**
(NKJV)

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." **Philippians 3:20**
(NKJV)

This letter was to be circulated among the churches in the five areas mentioned in Verse 1. The *elect* are believers; those who have come into a saving relationship with God by His sovereign activity on their behalf through the work of Jesus Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection. Salvation is the amazing work of God— His fore-knowledge, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and the obedience and blood of Jesus. Peter wants them to know who they are and how they became believers. God, through His mercy, accomplished this on their behalf. Look at how John said it: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." **John 1:12-13** (NKJV)

All of this God did according to His foreknowledge. God knows all things and He works all things according to His glorious plan. Warren Wiersbe explains it this way:

“Foreknowledge” does not suggest that God merely knew ahead of time that we would believe, and therefore He chose us. This would raise the question, “Who or what made us decide for Christ?” and would take our salvation completely out of God’s hands. In the Bible, to foreknow means “to set one’s love on a person or persons in a

personal way.”⁷

Be encouraged! You are a child of God by His work in and through you! Give thanks for what He has done.

Day 2– Read 1 Peter 1:3-5

Peter continues his encouragement even in the simple, traditional, and opening of this letter. We read yesterday that God had, even in the past, worked for their and our salvation. These words today have a little different emphasis. I like to say, “God has this.” In this case the, “this” is you and me. God has you; He has me. He has in His work of salvation wrapped us up and He will finish. He has caused us to be born again into a living hope. A living hope is one which has life in it. It is grounded on the living Word of God. We have life from the Word, from the resurrection and from the Spirit. He has made us alive and we live with this living hope.

He has provided for us an inheritance which is real, it will never rot, rust, decay or lose value. It can never be cheapened or changed in a negative way. It can only be valued for all of eternity. Think about it, you are an heir of God! All He owns is yours by inheritance!

Just think, what if it was up to you to keep yourself saved? How secure would that make you feel? I am so thankful for what Peter wrote here under the inspiration of the Spirit. He describes who they are by what God has done and refers to them (and us) as those, “Who are kept by the power of God.” He keeps us! Thank God! He is my keeper and He who began a good work will complete it. **Philippians 1:6** Talk about

⁷ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 2

encouragement. God is my keeper! I really enjoy the wording in the Amplified Bible:

"Who are being guarded (garrisoned) by God's power through [your] faith [till you fully inherit that final] salvation that is ready to be revealed [for you] in the last time." **1 Peter 1:5 (AMP)**

Once again, give thanks and rejoice in the security He has brought to your life, both now and forever.

Day 3– Read 1 Peter 1:6-9

“In this you greatly rejoice.” **Verse 6** What is the “this” in this case? God has saved you, secured you, and has set you up in His grace and mercy for eternity. It is in this that you greatly rejoice. I know, for me, I am too quick to whine and complain when things don't go my way. However, we all need to set our perspective on what God has done which is one of the only sure things we can know about. He has saved, secured, and set us up for eternity in His Kingdom.

We rejoice, but what about the trials we face? Peter used the word trials rather than tribulations or persecutions because he was dealing with the general problems Christians face as they are surrounded by unbelievers (Wiersbe). Also, Peter says in Verse 6, “If need be...” which lets us know there are times in our lives when God knows we need to go through trials. God uses trials to get us back on track when we have made a wrong turn. This is discipline. The trials are also sometimes to prepare us for spiritual growth. “Now for a little while” lets us know that compared to the blessings of eternity, this time on earth will be very short; which is to say, “This too shall pass.”

The major emphasis for the trials is to rest or prove the “...genuineness of your faith.” **Verse 7** The testing here is for the purpose of proving. This is what is done in the smelting process with metals. The purpose is to get to the pure metal and remove impurities. God is not interested in just testing us to see what we can do, but to prove us and enable us to become strong by removing impurities. As you go through these trials, you are strengthened and placed in a position to lean more on God—proving or strengthening your faith. In Ephesians 1:12, we read we, as God’s people, are to be to the “... praise of His glory.” Peter now shares that same thing here and connects it to the “Revelation of Jesus Christ.” **Verse 7** God has worked in our lives and we are His trophies, to His praise, honor and glory. This will be ultimately expressed at the time of our ultimate salvation. The revelation of Jesus is literally the apokakalypsei.

This is connected with the final coming of Jesus as He establishes His eternal Kingdom. We will be complete and be for His praise, honor and glory. We are His children, the apple of His eye. We are about bringing praise and glory to Him! Let’s do it!

Day 4– Read 1 Peter 1:10-12

What must it have been like to have been a prophet writing the sacred scriptures under the leading of the Holy Spirit? They wrote with limited understanding of what they were writing. In other words they often wrote having little idea what it all meant. There would have been understanding about the immediate, but the far reaching future ramifications, they did not have a clue.

In our dot connecting, we have looked at what was

prophesied and at the time we were studying them, we anticipated the dots would be connected. Now, we are in the New Testament and we are seeing in the scripture the fulfillment of many of those prophecies particularly about the Messiah, His suffering, and the salvation He came to bring. It is a wonderful thing to live in this time perspective. We have read the prophecies, we are reading about the fulfillment, and now we are experiencing the realization for ourselves. The prophets could only anticipate. They could not grasp the suffering of the Messiah. They could not see how suffering would bring benefits. They could not grasp the glory and how it fit with the suffering. They searched and inquired, longing to know and understand. They stood far off and wanted to know when, and for whom, these things would come.

"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." **Hebrews 11:39-40 (NKJV)**

The Old Testament prophets wrote in anticipation. We live with realization. One day, the ones who anticipated and those who realized some fulfillment will all fully realize the grace and mercy which results in God's salvation.

God, through the Holy Spirit, gave us the Bible. Not only did the writers of the Old Testament long to experience the things of which they wrote, but also the angels "... desire to look into them." **1 Peter 1:12** Angels are created beings. They do not experience salvation, nor do they need salvation. Yet, we read here they are so caught up with the splendor and majesty, they long to see and experience it.

"It is my opinion that the angels, God's created intelligences, are standing up yonder looking at you and me wondering why we don't get busy and give out this tremendous message today. They desire to do it themselves. They would love to come and proclaim it to the world."⁸

You and I are blessed. The Old Testament prophets wanted to know more and even experience the salvation and grace of which they wrote. The angels desire to look into the glorious salvation, but we are the recipients of this marvelous blessing. Don't miss the riches of what you have!

Day 5– Read Zechariah 13:7-9

This is the day we connect dots by looking at a passage from the psalms or one of the prophets and how it connects to Jesus. Zachariah was one of the prophets which Peter spoke about in 1 Peter 1:10. Zechariah, like the other prophets, wrote about the Messiah, but did not know it would be Jesus. Peter helps us connect some dots.

In our passages today, we read Zechariah spoke and recorded about a shepherd who would be struck. In this case, the Lord God is the speaker and Jesus, the Messiah, is the Shepherd who is spoken of. His deity is revealed when the Lord God says, "...the man of my companions" **Verse 7** which means the Shepherd is equal with God. The Lord God says of the Shepherd, "... strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter." **Verse 7** How do we know that this applies to Jesus? Because Jesus applies this very passage to Himself in Matthew 26:31.

⁸ Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee

Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ **Matthew 26:31 (NKJV)**

This was predictive of Jesus’ death and Jesus applied it to Himself. When He was arrested and crucified His followers scattered. Even Peter scattered, running away and denying Christ three times although he said he would never fall away.

Once again, we find ourselves in the privileged point of perspective. We get to read what the prophets wrote about which they did not understand and they could only anticipate its fulfillment. We also get to see its fulfillment and application. What a blessing it is. I am thankful for God choosing the Jews and, through the people of Israel, bringing the blessing of salvation and Dots Connected to us! Thank God for His plan and letting us look in on its glorious unveiling!

WEEK 74 GOD’S WORD IS LIVING

By Chris Watson

God used all types of men to write the Bible. While most early Christians only had the Torah, which is the first 5 books of the Old Testament, we are blessed to have the entire Bible. What we have is worth more than anything money could buy. The very words of God leads us in the way we should go and guides and directs us in the good and bad times. Often, we take God’s Word for granted and today, may we treasure God’s Word more than ever before.

Day 1– Read Hebrews 4:12

Warren Wiersbe says, “The Word exposes our heart; and then, if we trust God, the Word enables our hearts to obey God and claim His promises. This is why each believer should be diligent to apply himself to hear and heed God’s Word. In the Word we see God, and we also see how God sees us. We see ourselves as we really are. This experience enables us to be honest with God, to trust His will, and to obey Him.”⁹

The word of God is like a sword or a dagger that gets right to the heart of the issue. Notice Wiersbe says the Word “Exposes our heart.” I am thankful my whole heart is only exposed to God. What about you? Sometimes our true heart isn’t so great and we need God to do a makeover. In studying God’s Word, we see who we really are as God sees us. We also see what God desires and what God wants.

⁹ Be Confident, Hebrews, Warren Wiersbe

God knows not only our hearts, but our thoughts and our intent. We may be able to fool many, but we can't fool God. We must allow God and His Word to not only speak to our heart, but to change our heart. If we read it, hear it, but don't follow it, we are like the man who looks in the mirror and immediately looks away and forgets what he looks like.

What kind of condition is your heart in? Is it bitter, unforgiving, hateful or mean spirited? Or, is it forgiving, kind, thoughtful and gracious? As we are with God and in His Word, the latter should be true. If not, ask God to work on your heart. Ask Him to make His attitude yours and your thoughts His. We all need a heart checkup, what kind of condition is yours in?

Day 2– Read Hebrews 4:13

Our verse today tells us God is able to see and know everything we do and nothing is hidden from Him. In His eyes, we are basically naked like Adam and Eve. They could not hide from God and neither can we. Every thought you have ever had and every deed you have ever done are known to Him.

Romans 1:20 tells us we are all without excuse of knowing who God is and *everyone* will have to give an account of their lives on Judgement Day, "Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, and have known of his existence and great eternal power, So, they will have no excuse when they stand before God at Judgment Day." **Romans 1:20 (LBT)**

Scripture also reminds us that at the end of time, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus

Christ is Lord. We know that the things which are done for the Lord with pure and right motives will last and all other motives will burn up. Also, Matthew 12:36-37 says we will actually have to give an account to God specifically for our words! Sometimes my words are godly and sometimes they are not. Only if we have acknowledged Him as Savior and Lord and called on Him to save us will we be spending eternity with Him.

There are 5 heavenly crowns mentioned in the New Testament which will be awarded to believers. They are the imperishable crown, the crown of rejoicing, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory, and the crown of life. The Greek word translated crown is *stephanon* (the source for the name Stephen, the martyr) and means a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor generally. Used during the ancient Greek games, it referred to a wreath or garland of leaves laced on a victor's head as a reward for winning an athletic contest. As such, this word is used figuratively in the New Testament of the rewards of heaven God promises those who are faithful. Paul's passage in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 best defines for us how these crowns are awarded.

Obviously our goal as believers is not to store up crowns. If it is, our hearts and minds are not in the right place. Our actions, words and thoughts do matter. How is your heart? How are your actions? How are your words? We may need God to perform a heart change. Does your heart need some work? Remember, we will all give an account of our actions to Him.

Day 3 –Read Hebrews 4:14-15

These are a few of my favorite verses in all of scripture.

The Ultimate Authority, Creator, Sustainer and Savior is also our great High Priest. He is not a dead God, or a god of other religions which can't be known because they are so great and mighty. Our God is alive and He can be known personally. Hallelujah!

In the Old Testament, the high priest was the only priest who could enter the Holy Place, where God's presence lived. Once a year, the high priest would make a sacrifice for the sins of the people. The high priest in the Old Testament was a clear picture of what Jesus has done for us. With His blood He has covered our sins and He is the only one who could do this.

Christ's ministry lasted for three years and if we look at all of His ministry, we see He experienced being laughed at, mocked, ridiculed, excruciating physical and emotional pain and eventually death. Jesus understands what we go through. He understands our tears and our temptations, He can understand our bad days, and He can understand our ridicule because He has been there. God physically came and walked the earth, so we could know Him and we could be saved through His shed blood.

Spend some time today thanking God that He loved us enough to come to earth and save us. Thank Him for being our peace and hope in times of hurt and pain. He came and experienced that same hurt and pain we experience because of our sin.

Day 4— Read Hebrews 4:16

Only the High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifice for the people. Now we can go directly to the Father. We seek Him, we confess our sins to Him, we talk to Him,

and we receive instruction and guidance from His Word. When God's Word pierces our heart (Hebrews 4:12) and convicts us of sin, He shows us what He would have us do. Then we can draw near to Him and confidently confess and be in tune with Him.

Wiersbe says, "If we fail to hold fast to our confession, we are not proving that Jesus Christ has failed. We are only telling the world that we failed to draw on His grace and mercy when it is freely available to us."¹⁰ We have direct access to the throne of the Lord twenty four hours a day, 7 days a week. No one has to go for us, or can go for us. We can talk to God directly and when we fail to, we often falter.

Not only can we approach His throne of grace, but we can do it boldly. When are we to do it? We read in Verse 16 we are to approach "...In time of need." At first glance, we may read this verse and think we can only approach His throne of grace when things really get in a pinch. We often need clear direction in times of a crisis or what we see as times of need. If we are honest, we are always in a time of need because there is never a time when we don't need mercy and grace from the Lord.

Are you boldly approaching the throne of Jesus? Don't do so lackadaisically, haphazardly, or feeling like you are not worthy. The blood of Jesus, and only the blood of Jesus, has made you worthy to come to Him. Come to Him with your burdens, your sins, and your requests, and you will receive mercy and grace.

¹⁰ Ibid

Day 5– Read Nahum 1

Much of the Old Testament points towards Jesus. Today we read about Nahum, a prophet who was to deliver a message to the city of Nineveh. Remember who else in the Old Testament was to deliver a word to the Ninevites? Jonah. Like Jonah, Nahum’s message was not a fun one as it was going to be a message of judgement. In Verses 1-15, Nahum gives a message of good news to Judah telling them to keep their feasts and the wicked one would no longer pass through them.

“Today, looking back on this prophecy, we know that Jesus was the messenger God promised to send to Judah. When he started His ministry, Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). Jesus also said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). In verse 15, Nahum told God’s people to remember their feasts, because those feasts, like the Passover feast, pointed to Jesus.”¹¹

God’s plan is incredible. It’s a plan no human being alone could have come up with. All throughout the Old Testament we see Jesus conveyed. Though we don’t see His name mentioned, He is present all through the Old Testament. Thanks be to God we get to be part of His plan. He has saved us by His blood and now we can live the Good News and share with others.

¹¹ Old Story New, Marty Machowski, pg 396

WEEK 75 BY FAITH

By Dennis Watson

Chapters 1-10 of Hebrews is doctrinal while the remainder of the book, starting with Chapter 11, is practical. The start of the practical section begins with what has been called the *Faith chapter*. It has also been called the *Hall of faith*. In this chapter, we are told about people of old, referred to as Old Testament saints, who responded to God by faith. They were able to accomplish great and mighty feats as they obeyed God by way of faith. In the opening words faith is defined and then it is demonstrated. The reality of this chapter is faith works. It really does!

Day 1– Read Hebrews 11:1-4

In **Verse 1**, we have a definition of faith, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” Substance is a word which means to stand under; so it means foundations. The word for evidence here means conviction. So this is a foundational belief that God will do what He says. A person who has faith stands on the foundation of what God says and lives with conviction based on what He says. Warren Wiersbe says “True Bible faith is confident obedience to God’s Word in spite of circumstances and consequences.” Oswald Chambers says “faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the unseen as seen.”

I’m not sure if you have ever thought about it, but everyone has a guiding compass for their life. They have something or someone who is the guiding light of choices and decisions. This largely answers the question, “Why do you do what you do?” As you read about the Old Testament saints, God’s Word becomes the guiding

principle for their lives, choices, and activity. They lived by faith. They linked up with God and followed what He said and their faith went to work.

The Old Testament saints were commended for this and it was for them the very essence of how they viewed all things. They understood the universe and all things were ordered by God. For them this became their way of viewing their world and grasping reality. Life only makes sense from understanding that God made all things for His purpose. This sets the stage for one's worldview.

Surrendering to the truth of God, as revealed to you in the Word of God, is real faith. Taking God at His Word and then living accordingly is liberating surrender. It is liberating because we do not have to live without a compass or try to live with an ever-changing one. To surrender is to give up trying to figure out absolutely everything and trusting and falling on God.

Do you have a working faith? If so, you have discovered that it really does work and the more you work it, the more real it becomes.

Day 2– Read Hebrews 11:4-12

God gave testimony to the faith of these Old Testament saints. This means He commended them for acting in obedient surrender to His Word. Without a surrendering faith, it is not possible to receive such a testimony from God. All of the activity of God pointed to Jesus. In fact, it is safe to say the Old Testament saints placed their faith in God and the revelation they had of Him at that time. They were all saved or received commendation from God due to that faith. Abraham was considered righteous because of

his faith.

In this section today, we have five examples or demonstrations of faith that worked. All of these were commended for their faith. Abel, by faith, offered a better sacrifice than Cain. By faith, Enoch pleased God and was taken to heaven and did not see death. By faith, Noah built an ark and saved his family and the human race. By faith, Abraham moved to a land he knew nothing about and arrived there only by God's leading. By faith, Abraham's wife Sarah had a child in her old age. By faith, Abraham became the father of a great nation and through him all people are blessed.

Faith seems like a small thing; however it is **THE** powerful connection to the sovereign God of the universe. How can we possibly discount the faith which led to the building of the Ark and the new beginning that took place after the flood waters dissipated? Would it be possible to discount the choices of Abraham and Sarah which led to the family line that became the Jewish people who became the line from which Jesus Christ the Messiah came? Think about the impact of the Old Testament saints. Through their faith, the course of human history was changed; however, not just history, but eternity for billions of people.

Faith which works is a faith that saves. It doesn't just save the person exercising the faith, but it reaches way beyond just like with Abraham, Sarah and Noah. Think about your own faith. Does it work? Sounds like a loaded question, doesn't it? James said faith without works is dead. Your faith works and in doing so, it reaches beyond you. Faith works salvation, but it also has a tendency to work on other people as they see you exercise your faith. What are you doing by faith?

Day 3– Read Hebrews 11:13-28

This is the day we make the connection of the week’s passage with Jesus and the gospel. It is a blessing to be writing and preaching at the same time. Right now, I am writing about the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. It occurred to me that the Old Testament saints were pioneers of the faith. They had no one to learn from as they were the first. Although they did not know Jesus or even know anything about Him, they trusted in God to deliver. Jesus is the deliverer whom the entire Bible is about. These Old Testament saints responded to the revelation they had. In essence, they were looking forward to God’s saving plan in Jesus and we are looking back. Think about it this way, they had the pull of faith—being pulled forward to what was far off. We are being both pulled and pushed by faith. We have the testimony of all of the saints who have believed God in the past. We are pushed by the faith of those who have preceded us, but we are also being pulled by the promises of God which are yet to be fulfilled.

Can you imagine the first people who lived by faith in the one true living God? What if it had been up to us to be the faith pioneers? I am thankful for all the faith pioneers! They believed and lived with vision. Abraham was willing to offer his own son as a sacrifice. He knew God would take care of it by either raising up his son or providing a sacrifice. God chose to provide a sacrifice.

Moses, with vision, rejected the wealth of Egypt and being called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. The writer says Moses rejected the wealth of Egypt by choosing Christ and a heavenly reward. It is amazing that he says Moses chose Christ even though He had not yet been born into the world. Moses was living by faith by seeing the invisible!

Dr. George Morrison, a great Scottish preacher, once said, “The important thing is not what we live in, but what we look for.” These men and women of faith lived in tents, but they knew a heavenly city awaited them. God always fulfills His promises to His believing people, either immediately or ultimately.¹²

Jesus pulls it all together. He did it for them and He still does it for us. Give thanks!

Day 4— Read Hebrews 11:29-38

There are many names written in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11, but there was not time or enough room to include them all. All who trust and have trusted in God’s salvation through Jesus Christ could be included. It may seem at times your faith works seem to be insignificant, but living by faith is never small or insignificant.

These saints of old were so focused on the truth, word, ways, and promises of God, that they could not be distracted. They kept their eyes on the plan and promise of God. By faith, they followed through. They went through all kinds of trials and difficulties and some lost their lives in the process. They did not experience the things promised but they laid the foundation for us and now their faith is complete. For centuries, people have heard their testimonies. They prepared the way for the full expression of God’s redemption and those of us who have lived since Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead are recipients of their faith and faithfulness. Now their faith is complete—in us. What a blessing it is for them to see and

¹² Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary -New Testament, Volume 2

receive those into heaven and hear their testimony and how the faith of these Old Testament saints impacted so many people.

"Faith looks to the future, for that is where the greatest rewards are found. The people named in this chapter (and those unnamed) did not receive "the promises" (what was promised, Heb. 11:13) but they had God's witness to their faith that one day they would be rewarded. God's purpose involves Old Testament saints as well as New Testament saints! One day all of us shall share that heavenly city that true saints look for by faith. We today should give thanks for these saints of old, for they were faithful during difficult times, and yet we are the ones who have received the "better blessing". They saw some of these blessings afar off (see John 8:56), but we enjoy them today through Jesus Christ. If the saints of old had not trusted God and obeyed His will, Israel would have perished and the Messiah would not have been born."¹³

What are some historical events you have been part of in your life of faith? These events become life and eternity changing events. They are times when people have an encounter with the living God and begin to trust Him; as a result a testimony is built and God is exalted and glorified.

The saints of old can teach us many lessons as we read their accounts. One thing we really need to learn and apply daily so those who come behind us can hear about and see is our faith. We must become so zeroed in on God's truth, His word, His promises and His ways so we can guard against distractions that can hamper our faith. People are watching and need our testimony of faith.

¹³ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament-
The Bible Exposition Commentary- New Testament, Volume 2

Day 5– Read Psalm 25

Today is the day we look at a passage from the psalms or one of the prophets to see how it connects to Jesus or our great salvation. David, the psalmist and King, is mentioned in Hebrews 11:32. He is one of those heroes of the faith. David trusted in God’s plan to save him at some point in the future. David was aware that he was a sinner and that he could not save himself. Psalm 25 is a prayer of David for God to forgive him and take his sins away.

David used two words which speak of God’s forgiveness of sin. In **Verse 5**, he wrote, “You are the God of my salvation.” In **Verse 22**, he writes, “Redeem Israel, oh God.” Redeem means to buy back and salvation points to God’s work in Jesus to forgive sin. Both of these words connect to Jesus who is our redeemer and our salvation. God, by His very nature, is the Redeemer and Savior.

Think about it. Why does God forgive sin? David wrote about it in this prayer. God forgives sins because of His character. He is merciful and full of grace and truth. He forgives sins for His name’s sake. God’s forgiveness of our sins show how great He is. His character is on display and He is glorified in forgiving sin. Give thanks and praise to God that He has saved you. Not because of who you are, but because of who He is. Talk about a humbling thought! Our salvation and redemption is all about Him!

WEEK 76 LOVING ONE ANOTHER

By Chris Watson

Scripture tells us the world will know us by our love for one another. However, have you seen how Christians sometimes treat other Christians? Have you been on the giving or receiving end of this behavior? How Christians relate and treat each other is a testimony to the entire world. Our treatment of others shows other believers and the world that we love God if we do so in a kind, gracious and loving way.

Day 1– Read 1 John 3:11-15

“If a person admires and worships God and finds fulfillment by taking refuge in his merciful care, then his behavior toward his fellow man will reflect the love of God.”¹⁴ If I am walking with God as He intends, being obedient and loving Him, then love towards others should be evident. If we are not walking with God and being disobedient, then it will be clear we will not show that same love towards mankind.

Love comes only from God as He is the definition of love. He loves us with an everlasting love. “This is how we know what love is, He laid down His life for us.” **1 John 3:17** We will look at Verse 16 more closely tomorrow. Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners. He showed His love for us when He died on the cross for our sins.

Verse 11 tells us that we should love one another. If God is love and we receive our love from Him, then we should love others by His love. We must yield to God and His love to truly love others. Today’s verses in 1 John (especially verse 10) remind us we are to love our brother or sister, specifically

¹⁴ John Piper

other believers. We are to love them in word and deed. We are also to love with tough love as Paul often did in his writings; he loved them enough to tell the truth. Richard Blackaby has said, “It is far better to have an enemy who tells you the truth, than a friend who tells you lies.” A true friend loves his brother or sister when they also speak the tough truth; this is real love. We don’t just need “yes” people in our life, but brothers and sisters that will tell us the truth.

If we don’t regularly experience God’s love, we can become bitter, angry, hard-hearted, and downright mean. This is what happened to Cain. He let hate and anger burn in his heart and since he didn’t deal with it, it unfortunately dealt with him.

Is there another believer who you are having a hard time loving? Have you asked God to help you? If not begin today, ask Him to give you His grace and love for that person, being reminded the only way we can truly love others is through God’s love. We will look at Verse 16 more closely tomorrow.

Day 2– Read 1 John 3:16-24

We can say we love someone, but actions always speak louder than words. For instance, a person may say he loves us, but if he continues to act in a way that is mean or nasty towards us and continues to apologize, then that love may really not be there. Words must be followed up with actions.

Verse 17 tells us that if we see our brother or sister in need and don’t pay attention or see that we can help or meet the need, then the love of God does not abide in us! We saw this happen very clearly in the book of Acts with the beginning of the church. Remember Acts 2, particularly in verses

42-45, speaks of how they fellowshiped with each other as they sold their possessions and gave to anyone who was in need. They didn't do so because they had to, but they wanted to; they truly loved other believers.

There are believers in need all around us. When we think of needs, we often think financial. There are those who have financial needs and God may have you meet those needs. Needs may also be emotional, physical and spiritual. Some people need to be mentored, guided, and instructed. Some just need someone to listen and be there for them as they go through a difficult time.

There are needs of others all around us. What if we as believers were aware of each other's needs? The need to pray, the need to listen and share, the need to give, and the need to give or receive guidance. How might you meet such a need today? How might God use you to encourage and love others today? Pray and ask God if He would bring someone specific to mind who you can bless financially, emotionally or spiritually. How might God use you to bless someone?

Day 3– Read 1 John 4:7-11

We have already said that God is the very definition of love. **Verse 8** says, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” This verse means if we can't or won't love our brother or sister (through God's love), it might be God's love is not in us; we are not a believer. Scripture tell us that faith without works is dead. (James 2:14-26). It doesn't say we are saved by works because if we could be saved by works, we would not need Jesus. It does say that faith is dead if it is not followed by works. The words Jesus gave to the disciples were, “...Follow

Me.” It was a life change. Christ changed their lives and they followed Him. They wanted to know Him and His will and to have an ever-flowing relationship with Him. It was not just saying a prayer and got that taken care of. Rather it was put your trust in Jesus, confess your need for Him, and follow Him.

How can you love others today? How can you love your spouse, your kids and or your parents? How can you love your coworkers or class mates? How can you love the person which seems un lovable? How can you love your enemy or the non-believer that mocks you? We can only do this through His love. Ask God to help you love others today, through His power.

Day 4– Read 1 John 4:12-21

In the New King James Version the word abide is used 5 times in Verses 12-16. It speaks of both God abiding in us (our hearts and mind) and us abiding in Him. The word abide in the Greek simply means to remain or to stay. God abides in our heart which means He takes up residence and lives with us. He is always with us everywhere we go. **Psalm 139:7-10** says “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.” God abides in us at all times.

In Verses 15-16 of our passage today, we learn that we also abide in God. We are to remain/stay with God. This sounds easy, but often the temptation to walk away is real. Most of us know the words of the old hymn, “Come Thou Fount.” The words are, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the

God I love; here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above." This hymn describes how we have the tendency to not abide in Christ all the time. The problem is when we don't abide in Christ, we get ourselves in trouble and give into temptation. The importance of abiding continues to be revealed to me as a husband, father, pastor and friend. I must abide in Christ.

We abide in Christ when we read His Word, spend time in prayer, worship, or when we just enjoy His presence. Abiding in Christ most often doesn't happen by accident, but rather with intentionality. We intentionally make time to be with Jesus for if we don't make time, we most likely will find ourselves not abiding in Christ. How are you abiding in Christ? How are you letting Him abide in you? Are you intentional about it? Do you look to allow not just routines, but rather time with God daily? Ask God to help you abide in Him today and listen as He speaks.

Day 5– Read Psalm 35

David was often running for His life. In Psalm 35, we see David asking God to protect Him and to take care of His enemies. David was seeking not to take vengeance on his own. We should learn to let God handle our battles, even things which are said or done to us. He is in control. This is not to say we don't speak up if God leads in that way, but in the end we realize vengeance is not ours.

At the end of Psalm 35:19, David wrote that he was hated without cause. We know Jesus was hated without cause. We know this from John 15:25. Marty Machowski says, "They wanted an earthly king. The religious rulers hated Jesus for all kinds of reasons; they were jealous for his following, upset that he called them fakes (hypocrites), and

furious when Jesus reached out to the Samaritans.”¹⁵

Remember what Jesus did when they mocked Him, spit at Him, and said He lied about who He really was? He did nothing. He trusted God’s plan and knew God was in control. Jesus didn’t seek to defend Himself; He let God take care of it. As believers, we are to follow God, trust Him, obey Him, and let God do whatever needs to be done. We need to trust Him and know He is always in control.

Are you being ridiculed, laughed at, or mocked? Do what God would have you do and then trust Him. What do you need to put in God’s hands today?

¹⁵ Old Story New, pg 407

WEEK 77 WORTHY IS THE LAMB

By Dennis Watson

The book of Revelation is part of a much larger context: the whole Bible. Whereas, Genesis is the book of beginnings, Revelation is the book of consummation. It is the message given to John in the form of visions in which the divine program of redemption is brought to fulfillment. For several years we have been tracing the hand of God as He displays His power, glory and plan to redeem all of creation from the futility of sin. Over the next two weeks, we will be looking at the unfolding of God's final plan to bring His plan to its glorious, eternal fulfillment. Seek to have in your mind what it will be like when all of the dots are ultimately connected!

Day 1– Read Revelation 5:1-5

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, is the last chapter of dot connecting. In it, we find the wonderful completion of all that God has been doing. He brings it all together in the New Heaven and the New Earth. God gives John visions in which He reveals His final plan. The vision today begins with God the Father seated on the throne in heaven holding a scroll. It was written on both front and back which indicates nothing more could be added. The scroll was sealed with seven seals representing the final plan of God to bring His judgment and sovereign rule to the earth. It was the title deed to all that the Father promised Jesus because of His sacrifice on the cross.

However, the seals could only be opened by one who was qualified. There was no one to open the scroll so John was saddened to the point of weeping. A title deed can only be opened by the appointed heir. Jesus is the "... heir of all things" (**Hebrews 1:2**). He is also our Kinsman-redeemer that we looked at back in Ruth.

One of the elders spoke and encouraged those around by saying there was one who was worthy. He said, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” **Verse 5** This was clearly referring to Jesus. This is a case of dots being connected. In Genesis 49:9-10, Jacob blessed his son Judah calling him a lion’s whelp. He also said the scepter would not depart from Judah. The king Jacob was speaking of is Jesus.

Jesus was worthy to open the scroll which revealed the final victory plan of God to restore His kingdom and destroy evil forever. He was worthy because He was the one who had won the victory over sin and through the resurrection was proclaimed by God to be the eternal King. Rejoice that the Kingdom of God is at hand and we know the final chapter! Give thanks He is in control! He will ultimately cause the “... kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ” **Revelation 11:15**.

Day 2– Read Revelation 5:6-8

Yesterday, we read God the Father was seated on the throne holding a scroll. The scroll was written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. The scroll revealed the final victory of God. There was only one who was worthy to open the scroll revealing its contents and thus unfolding what was to come. An elder in the throne room indicated there was one who could open the scroll and its seven seals who was the Lion of the tribe of Judah which pointed to Jesus. Today, He comes forward and receives the scroll.

John sees in his vision a lamb which looked like it had been slain. It had seven horns and seven eyes. It was a strange sight, but, obviously, it would reveal that it was Jesus Christ who was the Son of God who died and was raised from the dead. He is the one worthy to take and open the scroll and begin the process of God’s judgment and rule on the earth. He looked as though He had been

slain because He is the one who was pierced and crucified. The seven horns are indicative of His power. He is all powerful. The seven eyes speak of His all-seeing and all-knowing nature.

He takes the scroll and the elders and living creatures around the throne begin to worship Him. They praise and worship Him because He is omnipotent—all powerful. They praise and worship Him because He is omniscient—all knowing. They praise Him because He is the lamb who has taken away the sin of the world and now is about to begin the final installment of God’s plan of judgment and redemption.

It is amazing God has made all these things known to us. All the way back to the opening pages of Genesis, God has been revealing His incredible plan. He has been overseeing it and unfolding it. He is not yet finished but we know He will. This is what Revelation is all about. Give thanks to God for Jesus and His plan of redemption that is still unfolding. We are in His hands!

Day 3– Read Revelation 5:9-14

This is the day we make the connection of the week’s passage with Jesus and the gospel. After Jesus took the scroll from the elders, the four living creatures representing God’s creation and all of the angels began to sing songs of worship, the gospel, missions, and prophecy to the lamb which was Jesus. The old song was the song of creation, but the new and eternal Son is the song of redemption. The weeping had ended and the praise begun.

They sang a worship song to the lamb because He is worthy. To worship means to ascribe worth. There is none other who is worthy to receive this praise except Jesus. He is worthy because He was slain and accomplished redemption.

The song was a song of the gospel because the lamb had been

slain. He was slain to take away sin. He was slain to remove guilt. He was slain so that those who trust in Him will live forever. The song of the gospel is about the cross and the blood. Some people want to remove reference to blood from hymns. Others are offended when blood is mentioned in preaching. It is by His blood we are made righteous.

They sang a song of missions. Jesus' death on the cross bought for all people salvation. The redemption Jesus purchased by His blood was for people from all of the tribes, tongues, peoples and nations. The plan of Jesus, our Savior, was that the message would be taken to all nations.

They sang a prophetic song. In Verse 10 we see that what Jesus has accomplished would make it possible that "We shall reign on the earth." When Jesus Christ returns to earth in triumph, He will establish His righteous kingdom for 1,000 years; and we shall reign with Him (Rev. 20:1-6). The prayers of the saints, "Thy kingdom come!" will then be fulfilled. Creation will then be set free from bondage to sin (Isa. 11:1-10; Rom. 8:17-23), and Christ shall reign in justice and power.

We have so much to sing about now, but can you imagine the songs we will sing then? Can you imagine the power, joy and enthusiasm with which all will sing? We may sing with what appears to be boredom now, but I assure you, we will sing with great joy and the sound will be overwhelming.

Start singing the songs of praise and worship anticipating that glorious time. Practice singing like He is the only one listening.

Day 4– Read Revelation 6

Jesus was worthy to take the scroll and open the seven seals. In breaking the seals the final judgment of God began. The first six

seals were opened in rapid succession, one after the other. With each one another judgment of God swept across the earth. We know from scripture that this judgment is coming. It is part of that time known as the Great Tribulation. We also know that it is part of God's plan to deal with sin and establish His reign of justice, righteousness and peace. There is no need to fear these judgments because God has taken care of His own.

When the first seal is opened, the deceiver, who is the Antichrist, goes through the earth as a conqueror who went out conquering. This is the one who imitates Christ pretending to be Him. Jesus opened the seal and He is the one who is in charge.

The second seal is opened by Jesus and war sweeps over the earth. What a contrary picture. The world longs for a worldwide leader believing He will bring peace but instead of peace ultimately war comes. The second seal, again under the control of Jesus, brings war in the midst of the Great Tribulation.

When the third seal is opened, famine sweeps across the earth. War and famine go together. Think about a war that is really a world war. There would be a shortage of food and what food would be available, the price would be exorbitant. This would be one of the ways that the Antichrist would gain control of the economy.

When the fourth seal is opened, death and hades are unleashed. John saw these enemies going forth to claim their prey, armed with weapons of the sword, hunger, pestilence (death), and wild beasts. In ancient times, hunger, pestilence, and the ravages of beasts would be expected to accompany war. We know that Jesus is in control and ultimately both death and hades will be cast into hell (Revelation 20:14)

The fifth seal being opened gives a glimpse of encouragement. Those who have died as witnesses (martyrs) are seen asking "How

long, O Lord, Holy and True, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” These saints are pleading for justice on the basis of God’s law.

The sixth seal brings the appearance on the earth of worldwide convulsions and catastrophes. All of nature will be affected. There are earthquakes, the stars fall and the sun is darkened and the moon becomes like blood. The result is different from what we saw in the fifth seal where the martyrs cried, “Avenge us;” here the unbelievers on earth cry “Hide us.”

The opening of the seventh seal will introduce the seven “trumpet judgments” (Rev. 8-11) and the wrath of God will increase both in intensity and scope. But before that occurs, we are assured that in His wrath, God will remember mercy (Hab. 3:2). Despite the wrath of God and the terror inspired by Satan and his helpers, multitudes will be saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. No matter what the age or dispensation, God’s way of salvation has always been the same: faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.¹⁶

When all of this comes, who can stand? No one can stand against the wrath of God. Our only hope is Jesus.

Day 5– Read Psalm 89:1-29

Day 5 is the day we look at a psalm or one of the prophets and make a connection to Jesus or our great salvation. The New Scofield Reference Bible calls Psalm 89 the psalm of the Davidic Covenant. It is a psalm that is about the faithfulness of God concerning the promise made to King David. It is a psalm written by a man named Ethan about King David, but it was fulfilled by King Jesus.

¹⁶ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Serues) - New Testament-
The Bible Exposition Commetary - New Testament, Volume 2

The main topic of this psalm is the faithfulness of God. The faithfulness of God is mentioned 10 times. The word covenant is mentioned four times. This is a psalm of great excitement. It is different from the previous psalm which was characterized by gloom. No gloom here, only praise and rejoicing because God will show His faithfulness to King David.

God kept His promise to David by sending Jesus who is “The Holy One of Israel.” Victory over sin is the main celebration of the book of Revelation. It was foretold in the Old Testament as well as in our passage today and celebrated in Revelation. The writer of Psalm 89 began to celebrate what was to come because of God’s faithfulness.

Now we celebrate because we are the generations to come in Psalm 89:1&4. God’s covenant to David was that He would be sending One in his line.

J. Vernon McGee spoke of the faithfulness of God which was emphasized in Psalm 89:

The covenant centers on the Lord Jesus Christ. Of Him God says, “Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” Look at this -- it is wonderful. When God sent the Lord Jesus into this world, He came as the only begotten Son, and by His incarnation yonder at Bethlehem He became the Son of God. Thus He was revealed in His life of humiliation -- God manifested in the flesh. And after He died a sacrificial death -- for that is the reason He came from heaven -- He became in resurrection the firstborn, the first begotten from the dead. He is speaking of the resurrected Christ:” Also I will make him my firstborn” -- the resurrected Christ, the One who came back from the dead after He had died on the cross. It simply means that the scepter of this universe is in nail pierced hands.¹⁷

¹⁷ Through the Bible with J. Vernon McGee

God is always and only faithful. It is impossible for God to lie or to break His promises. He assures David time and again He would keep His covenant with him. We are the recipients of that! Our salvation is a miracle of God's plan and purpose! Give praise to Him, always!

WEEK 78 AT THE THRONE WORSHIPPING

By Chris Watson

Heaven will be a great place where we will enjoy God's presence apart from sin and its effects. If that sounds boring or unexciting to you, it could very well be you are not worshipping God on a regular basis now. It's been said that knowing God on earth is a warm-up for heaven. How are you walking and worshipping Him now?

Day 1– Read Revelation 7:1-10

It has been said that the end is near. We do know it is closer today than it was yesterday. No one knows the day or the hour when Jesus will come back. There are some things we do know based on Verses 9-10. All people (from all tribes, nations, people and tongues) were praising God. This isn't saying all peoples are doing this, but there were people praising God from all tribes and or nations. God will not come back until every tribe, people group, and nation hears the Gospel and there will be some from every group who will trust in Jesus.

According to the IMB (International Mission Board) there are 11,500 people groups in the world. Of those people groups, 6,808 are less than 2% evangelical. There are 3,058 unreached and unengaged people groups in the world, and of those people groups 329 of them have a population over 1000.¹⁸ So 9,866 people groups do not have access to the Gospel or if they do, only 2% or less of their population are evangelical Christians. This helps us get a perspective of the people who still need to be reached with the Gospel.

Are you looking forward to Jesus coming back? Do you want to do

¹⁸ <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/default.aspx>

your part? Share your faith, go on a mission trip, and ask God how you might be involved on going and sharing with unreached/unengaged people groups. Think about how God might use you. Think about how God has used some of you as you have shared your faith, not only with your friends, but with those in West Virginia, Baltimore, Canada, Southeast Asia, NAME or other mission areas you might have traveled to in the past.

I have been on seven international mission trips and each time I have truly been changed and reminded of the lostness in our world. We are part of God's plan and He lets us be a part. May we be an obedient part because everyone needs to hear the Good News. In our passage today, we read where people are praising God and calling out and recognizing that salvation comes from the Lord. There is only one name under heaven by which men must be saved and that is Jesus. Have you called on His name? Have you shared it with others? How are you sharing it now?

Day 2– Read Revelation 7:11-12

Today's scripture tells us that the angels, elders, and the four living creatures fell on their face worshipping God. They were saying "... blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God." **Verse 12** God is either all of these or deserves all of these. God blesses and knowing God is a blessing. God deserves all the glory; we don't deserve any of it. All wisdom comes from God and God alone. God is also worthy to be honored and to Him all thanksgiving is given. Remember any good and perfect gift comes from the Lord. Lastly, God is mighty, there is no one that compares to Him. In these verses we have the angels, the elders, and the creatures praising the Lord, and in our verses from yesterday we have every tribe, nation, tongue and people group doing the same.

Think about those worshipping the Lord. How did they get there,

and how do we get to know God and experience Him now and in heaven? Through Jesus, trusting Him as our Savior and Lord and following Him. For if we truly trust Him, we will follow. What about those closest to us? What about your spouse, kids, family, coworkers and friends? Will they be there worshipping with you? Only God knows their true heart. Often times, we don't know or are not sure of whether or not those closest to us are believers. We can share with them and ask if they know God and if they have trusted Him. We can watch their lives and who they are following. It's often the hardest to share with those closest, but it should not be. Those are the ones we love and want to experience God and heaven along with us.

Who are you praying for today that is lost? Who are you asking God to do a miracle in? With whom, today, do you need to share your faith? Do you need to pick up the phone and call a friend and ask him where he stands with Jesus? If we truly have experienced Jesus and His blessings, we will want others to experience Him as well. Who will you share and talk with today? May God give you the words and peace that you need to share with others.

Day 3– First Read Revelation 7:13-17

Our passage today speaks of those who are saved during the Tribulation. Other parts of Revelation help us see the Tribulation will be an awful time. Daniel 9 and 12 also speaks of the Tribulation and how it will be an intense time. The Great Tribulation is mentioned in our passage today. The length of the Tribulation will be 7 years and the Great Tribulation will be the last 3 1/2 years and will be the most intense time. Today's scripture does tell us some will be saved during this awful time.

Those saved will be saved just like you and I. Their robes will be washed and, "made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Verse 14 The only way we can be saved is by Jesus' blood. We are saved

when we put our faith in Him and what He has done.

Verse 17 tells us “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” This is true for those coming out of the Tribulation and also true for us as believers. This sin-ridden world can get discouraging and depressing if our eyes are not on Jesus. We have all been through trying times and God can and will use those to draw us to Him even more. Those times can be painful. God tells us there will be no tears and heaven will be full of His glory. Take a few moments and try to think of a place without sin and the effects of sin. Can you do it? I can’t because all we have ever known is sin. Thankfully, in this world, we have the Holy Spirit and God’s leading. Can you imagine going through it and not having it? God is good, praise the Lord. Thank Him for saving you.

Day 4— Read Revelation 21:1-8

In studying this week’s passage, I found an excerpt which will help explain our verses today better than I can.

“The New Jerusalem, which is also called the Tabernacle of God, the Holy City, the City of God, the Celestial City, the City Four-square, and Heavenly Jerusalem, is literally heaven on earth. It is referred to in the Bible in several places (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews

11:10; 12:22–24; and 13:14), but it is most fully described in Revelation 21.

In Revelation 21, the recorded history of man is at its end. All of the ages have come and gone. Christ has gathered His church in the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17). The Tribulation has passed (Revelation 6—18). The battle of Armageddon has been fought and won by our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:17–21). Satan has been chained for the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth (Revelation 20:1–3). A new, glorious temple has been established in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40—48). The final rebellion against God has

been quashed, and Satan has received his just punishment, an eternity in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7–10.) The Great White Throne Judgment has taken place, and mankind has been judged (Revelation 20:11–15).

In Revelation 21:1 God does a complete make-over of heaven and earth (Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:12–13). The new heaven and new earth are what some call the “eternal state” and will be “where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13). After the re-creation, God reveals the New Jerusalem. John sees a glimpse of it in his vision: ‘The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband’ (Revelation 21:2). This is the city that Abraham looked for in faith (Hebrews 11:10). It is the place where God will dwell with His people forever (Revelation 21:3). Inhabitants of this celestial city will have all tears wiped away (Revelation 21:4).

The New Jerusalem will be fantastically huge. John records that the city is nearly 1,400 miles long, and it is as wide and as high as it is long—a perfect cube (Revelation 21:15–17).

The city will also be dazzling in every way. It is lighted by the glory of God (verse 23). Its twelve foundations, bearing the names of the twelve apostles, are ‘decorated with every kind of precious stone’ (verse 19). It has twelve gates, each a single pearl, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (verses 12 and 21). The streets will be made of pure gold (verse 21). The New Jerusalem will be a place of unimagined blessing. The curse of the old earth will be gone (Revelation 22:3). In the city are the tree of life “for the healing of the nations” and the river of life (verses 1–2). It is the place that Paul spoke of: ‘In the coming ages [God] might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:6). The New Jerusalem is the ultimate fulfillment of all God’s promises. The New Jerusalem is God’s goodness made fully manifest.

Who are the residents of the New Jerusalem? The Father and the Lamb are there (Revelation 21:22). Angels are at the gates (verse 12). But the city will be filled with God's redeemed children. The New Jerusalem is the righteous counter to the evil Babylon (Revelation 17), destroyed by God's judgment (Revelation 18). The wicked had their city, and God has His. To which city do you belong? Babylon the Great or the New Jerusalem? If you believe that Jesus, the Son of God, died and rose again and have asked God to save you by His grace, then you are a citizen of the New Jerusalem. 'God raised [you] up with Christ and seated [you] with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:6). You have 'an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade' (1 Peter 1:4). If you have not yet trusted Christ as your Savior, then we urge you to receive Him. The invitation is extended: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).¹⁹

God is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, He is all we need! Thank Him for who He is and look forward to worshipping in heaven and also worship and praise Him now.

Day 5– Read Psalm 96

What a great God we serve. He is greatly to be praised. In praising Him, we are to take His name across the world. Take some time and re-read this Psalm verse by verse. Take each verse or a verse or two and pray it back to the Lord, or pray what God brings to your heart regarding that verse. Spend some time praising, thanking, and glorifying the Lord.

The Psalm wraps up with "For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness,

¹⁹ www.gotquestions.org

and the peoples with His Truth.” Verse 13 Each second, minute and day we live, we are that much closer to His coming. Until He comes; however, we are to proclaim His name to our community and to the nations for when He comes, He will judge.

Those who have trusted in Jesus will spend eternity with Him and those who have not, will spend eternity without Him. God reminds us in scripture He is not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. He uses us as His ambassadors to our families, friends, and world. He has called us to make known the good news. I trust you know Jesus, and if you do, how are you sharing Him with others, who are you telling, and who are you praying for to come to know Him? Praise the Lord that when He judges those who know Jesus, they will be marked with His seal and marked as His children forever and ever. God has left us here to love, speak truth, and share the word. Today and the rest of our lives, may we walk with Jesus and share Jesus with those we know and those we don't. How will you carry out the greatest commandment today?

ADDITIONAL WEEKS OF STUDY

MARRIAGE: CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

By Dennis Watson

This is one of my favorite sections in the Bible. From the first sentence in this passage, it appeared that Paul was talking about marriage. As you read this you come to the real significance. Verse 32 says, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” Paul was not talking about marriage between a man and a woman, but he was talking about the relationship between Christ and His church. Marriage between a man and a woman was used to illustrate the relationship between Christ and His church.

Day 1– Read Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:16-25

Marriage is God’s idea. Two genders were God’s design. The reason for the two genders is so that mankind, created by God in His image and likeness, would be able to multiply and fill the earth. God’s plan is simple, biological and natural. He made animals of two genders and He made man of two genders for the purpose of propagation. In Malachi, God speaks through the prophet telling the people they had made a mess of marriage. He made the wife and the husband for the purpose of expanding the kingdom in history. In Malachi 2:15, he says He made them male and female because “...He seeks a godly seed.”

Here is what Tony Evans says of this verse: “What does the Lord seek through the marriage covenant? Too many people think the purpose of marriage is happiness. But happiness is a benefit of marriage, not its purpose. The purpose of God’s covenants is always the expansion of his kingdom in history. Through marriage, in particular, God seeks godly offspring. That means that having a child isn’t about gaining a “mini-me.” God wants us to have and raise children in the knowledge of the Lord so that his image is

spread worldwide for his glory.”²⁰

It is very logical, biological and natural. Right after Genesis 2:23 where Adam rejoices over the woman that they were man and woman, Moses writes, “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Verse 24 The therefore in the NIV reads, “... and for this reason.” One flesh is a marriage thing, and the marriage only works to bring about babies when there is a biological male and a biological female.

As in the days of Malachi and the stubborn Israelites, we have made a mess of marriage. May the Lord send a great revival and let mankind see once again what the animals have figured out.

Day 2– Read Ephesians 5:22-24

I believe that from these verses in Ephesians we are given two essential roles for marriage. One role is for the husband and the other is for the wife. If you back up one verse to Ephesians 5:26, in this context you will read it is directed at the relationships in the church body. **Verse 21** reads, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” The word submitting appears in Verse 21 in how believers in the church are to relate to one another and then it shows up in Verses 22-24 about wives submitting to their husbands. Within the church, members are to look to Jesus and have their relationships governed and guided by Him. Submission does not have to do with order of authority, but it governs the operation of authority. Submission is about respect, surrender, giving and receiving input.

Within the marriage, the wife’s role is to share with her husband

²⁰ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda.

what she sees, feels and senses. Women have a tendency to be more sensitive than men. I do not necessarily mean from an emotional perspective. I mean more sensitive to what is going on around them. In my home, Sheila is more sensitive and she is also discerning. She sees things I do not and she hears things I do not hear. She picks up on things to which I am oblivious. Her role is to submit this information to me so I can be the leader I am supposed to be.

I am not a woman. I need what she brings to the marriage. She also has needs which I do not know unless she submits them to me. I have shared with a multitude of wives the benefits of following what I have learned from Sheila. Tell your husband what you need, what you feel, and what you think. I must admit, I am not always as receptive as I need to be, but I cannot afford for her to stop sharing with me. As men, we must understand that it is a great burden for your wife to constantly be telling you what she sees, needs and feels. Seek the Lord! The wife's role is essential.

Marriage needs to mirror the church submitting to Christ and man in submission to Christ. Jesus needs us to tell Him what we need, although He already knows. Husbands need their wives to submit because the husband probably does not know.

This is not an issue of distinction of value. God the Son is equal in essence to God the Father. He is; however, subordinate in terms of function. The wife submits and the husband loves which we will discuss tomorrow.

Day 3– Read Ephesians 5:25-26

Think about a roof on a house. There are two sides coming together at the peak. In a way, they are leaning on one another, giving strength to the roof structure. I see it the same in marriage where both sides are necessary for there to be proper function and

strength. The wife submits, but I am not talking of obedience alone. Although obedience is not eliminated. Jesus said if you love me you will obey me. That is not a legalistic obedience but a desired obedience because of love. When you love someone you want to give them what they want and what they need. Both husband and wife should, out of love, do for one another.

The wife submits her ideas, needs, concerns and what she senses. The husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church. Each role is independent of the other, but will, in essence, compliment the other. The wife is not to concern herself with the husband's role and the husband is not to concern himself with the wife's role.

The husband's role requires a great deal of seeking the Lord. The role is to be carried out just as Christ loves His church. What man can do this? Not one! Husbands should have a very strong daily prayer life that includes this prayer, "Lord Jesus, enable me to love my wife as you loved your church and gave yourself up for her! I need you Lord!"

To fulfill this role as a husband constant humility is required. No man can do it alone. It requires desperate seeking of the Lord. Seek the Lord. The husband's role, like that of the wife, is essential.

Day 4– Read Genesis 12:10-20

There is a very significant phrase in **Ephesians 5:25** where husbands are told to "... love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her." This is the highest view of a husband's love. Remember, Jesus died for His church. We read in the Old Testament where two of the fathers of the faith were willing to sacrifice their wives for their own safety. In today's passage, you read of the account of Abram (later his name was changed to Abraham and Sarai's to Sarah) plotting with Sarai, his

wife, to tell the people of Egypt she was his sister. It was a half truth because she was a relative, but the intent was to deceive in order to protect Abram. Here are his plotting words to Sarai: "Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you." **Genesis 12:12-13** Talk about premeditated! It was Abram's idea and Sarai went along with it.

Later, it became a case of like father like son because Isaac did the same thing with Rebekah. Both Abram and Isaac were willing to sacrifice their wives to save their skin. What a contrast with Jesus! He died for His bride, the church. He did all of the work to sanctify her, to make her holy and to present to Himself a glorious church.

I have to remind you, at this point, Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:32 he is talking about Christ and the church. He is using a human marriage to show us His plan for His bride, the church and the bridegroom Jesus! What a high view of marriage! Perhaps this should be our view of marriage.

Day 5– Read Revelation 19:1-10

The imagery of Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as the bride of Christ is clearly presented in scripture. The main passage this week in Ephesians is about Christ and the church. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses marriage as an illustration of the relationship of Christ and His church.

In the days of the writing of the New Testament, weddings followed a three phase format. The first phase was that of the betrothal. This corresponds to what we call the engagement. This is where Mary and Joseph were when Mary came to be with child by

the Holy Spirit. Mary and Joseph were not married, but he would have to put her away if he chose not to marry her since she was pregnant. It was a more binding agreement than our engagement. The betrothal was an agreement between the bride's parents and the groom's parents, usually affirmed with a dowry payment. This illustrates the relationship with Jesus and His church. God sent Jesus and paid the payment of His Son's blood to have believers (the church) as His betrothed.

The second phase was the wedding. It involved the groom and his friends going to the home of the bride's father to get her and take her to his father's home. There would be a parade of the groom and his friends to take the bride for the wedding and the consummation of the marriage. This further illustrates the marriage of Christ and His church. He will come to get His bride, the church, and take her to His Father's house in an event called the rapture of the church. With the bride of Christ safely in heaven, the seven-year period of the tribulation will begin on the earth.

At the end of the tribulation, Jesus will return, known as the second coming, with His bride and there will be a one-thousand-year wedding feast during the Millennial reign of Christ.

What a picture God has given us of His relationship with His people! It is for us to use the picture of His love for His church and the church's submission to Him to be a reminder of the need for us to all have a high view of marriage because God sure has one!

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." **Hebrews 13:4 (NIV)**

JOHN WRITES THE BOOK OF REVELATION

By Dennnis Watson

We have made it to the end of the written Word of God; the Bible, Old and New Testaments. We have traced the hand of God in and through a nation. It all started in the pages of Genesis with the creation of everything from nothing. God then created man in His image, male and female and a terminal disease came when man sinned against the God who made him. From there, God began to reveal His plan to redeem man as the disease spread with each birth. God established a nation and through that nation, He brought the Redeemer into the world. The sinless Son of God came into the world to save sinners delivering mankind from the sin curse and death. The last book of the Bible is the culmination of God's plan revealed in the revelation of Jesus Christ. This week we look at the writing of the book of Revelation.

Day 1– Read Revelation 1:1-3

When you hear the word ‘apocalypse’ what comes to mind? It brings to mind an event involving destruction or damage on an awesome or catastrophic scale. We encounter this word in the opening of the book of Revelation. The Greek translation for revelation in Verse 1 is apokalupsis which means literally unveiling or taking off the cover. When we think of the book of Revelation, we think of the end of the world as we know it. The description of the surrounding events is scary especially to the unbeliever.

It must be noticed and must be understood that this book is not just a revelation, but it is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It is not about the event, but about the person, the God-man, Jesus Christ and God's final unveiling of Christ for His plan and purpose. In the book of Daniel, we read that Daniel was told to, "...shut up the words, until the time of the end." **Daniel 12:4** We learn much from both Daniel and the revelation about this unveiling which is particularly about the return of Jesus Christ. His second coming will be in two stages. The first stage is known as the rapture of the church and the second stage is known as His final coming after the tribulation to establish His eternal kingdom on earth.

John is the author of the book of Revelation. The contents of this book came from God to John through various means. In this chapter we discover later he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos for writing the Word and for the testimony of Christ. All of the other apostles had been killed for their faith, but John, however, was exiled. He was clearly part of God's plan to get this message to the churches of history.

This book was written to the servants of God, not to frighten, but to inform and encourage us about things that were to come regarding Jesus. The church is not mentioned again after Chapter 3. There is a promise here that those who read, hear, and follow these teachings will be blessed. At some point before Chapter 4, the church has been raptured or taken to paradise. We do not experience the scary parts which take place during the seven-year tribulation period. God is giving us a revelation for us to sound the alarm for those who are not one of His servants. I do not plan to be part of the scary time. I am one of His children and I know He will take me to paradise during the rapture of the church. How about you?

Day 2– Read Revelation 1:4-8

The message of the revelation of Jesus Christ was and is for the seven churches of Asia which is known as modern Turkey. Why seven? Seven is the number of completeness or fullness. It is not just to those seven churches, but to all churches of all the ages. Henry Morris puts it this way, “Christ’s message is to be conveyed to and through local churches, with real, visible members and activities, not to an invisible illusory body called “the church universal.” Even though all churches are in mind here, Christ through John selects seven representative churches in Asia Minor to stand for all churches everywhere.”²¹

John is the human author of the message, but the content is from God. All three members of the triune God are mentioned here; the eternal, self-existent God the Father, the seven spirits—the Holy Spirit in completeness, and Jesus. Jesus is, for all believers, the firstborn from among the dead. He is the first of all who will come to Him for resurrection power. Jesus is the ruler of kings. His blood has delivered us from sin and it is Jesus who has made us to be a kingdom of priests. As priests, we represent God before people and we represent (intercede) people before God.

It is this Jesus who is coming. It is this Jesus who wants the people, churches of all the ages to have peace and grace because they can know He is coming, He is in control, and He will deliver them. Clearly, this was written to bless, grace, and encourage believers in all times of

²¹ Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Prophetic Book of the End Times* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1983), 36.

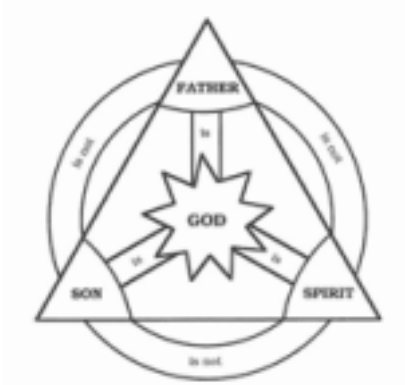
history.

I want to close today with the amazing theological, biblical doctrine of the Trinity. For thousands of years, this doctrine has been discussed, preached, debated and illustrated, but will always escape explanation. Our mind cannot take it in. I bring this up because **Verse 8** is God the Father speaking saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Then, in **Revelation 22:13**, it is Jesus who says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning of the End, the First and the Last.” However, each of these, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one and are one God. I like to get a clear concise expression at times and I have come to appreciate **gotquestions.com**. Here is the final statement on an article entitled, “What Does the Bible Teach about the Trinity?”

The doctrine of the Trinity has been a divisive issue throughout the entire history of the Christian church. While the core aspects of the Trinity are clearly presented in God’s Word, some of the side issues are not as explicitly clear. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God—but there is only one God. That is the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Beyond that, the issues are, to a certain extent, debatable and non-essential. Rather than attempting to fully define the Trinity with our finite human minds, we would be better served by focusing on the fact of God’s greatness and His infinitely higher nature. “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” (Rom. 11:33-34).

Below is the best symbol for the Trinity we are aware of:



Everything we know about God comes from the Word of God and we accept by faith. Some things we can explain better than others. When explanation fails, use faith.

Day 3– Read Revelation 1:9-11

John shares he was the one receiving the message which he had been instructed to write down. What he has been commanded to write is what God has shown him and what he had heard. Why was he on the island of Patmos? The island of Patmos is located in the Aegean Sea and because of where he was and the people he was writing to, he had to use a style of writing that the Roman authorities would not understand. John was on the island of Patmos because he continued to stand strong in the faith. Standing strong in the faith meant he would not worship anyone or anything other than God. Persecution of believers had grown intense. In the mid 60's a.d., the emperor Nero was feeding Christians to the lions. All of the apostles had been martyred for their faith, except John. Peter was crucified upside down because he felt he was unworthy to be crucified like Christ. By the early to mid 90's, the persecution had

grown even more intense. All Roman subjects were required to worship the emperor Domitian. In the temple of Domitian, the people were required to put in a pinch of incense and say, “Caesar is Lord.” John refused! For that reason, he was sent to the rock quarry on the island of Patmos. Execution was avoided to prevent from giving the believers a martyr which could have spurred them on in their commitment to the truth of Jesus Christ.

John heard a voice like a trumpet. It was the voice of Jesus, God the Son, declaring He was the “Alpha and the Omega, the first and the Last.” He was to write what he saw and heard in a book and send it to the seven churches of Asia. Seven was the complete number representing all of the churches of all of the ages.

The message was given to encourage believers to persevere in the midst of difficulties and tribulation and this message was that Jesus was coming again to judge and to rule and establish His Kingdom which would never end.

Day 4– Read Revelation 1:12-16

God revealed the message of the revelation of Jesus Christ to John. Twenty-seven times we find the phrase “I heard” and the phrase “I saw” thirty-six times in the book of Revelation. What John heard and saw lets us know there is more to what is happening and will happen than we can see or hear. He had this special revelation of Jesus Christ from Jesus Christ. In **Verse 10**, John heard a voice like a trumpet identifying Himself as Jesus, “The Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.” He then sees One like the Son of Man.” **Verse 13** Darrell Johnson says, “John is referring to that towering figure in the great vision God gave the prophet Daniel hundreds of years before.

The vision is recorded in Daniel 7:13-14.”²²

He sees this figure, who is clearly Jesus, walking among seven golden lampstands. He also has seven stars in His hand. At the end of Revelation 1, the seven golden lampstands are identified as the seven churches and the seven stars are the angels or the messengers of the churches.

Jesus, the victorious Jesus, the Priest, Ruler, King is walking among the churches and He holds the messengers in His hand. Jesus is there with the churches to guarantee their safe delivery through hardship and tribulation.

The image of Jesus John sees is much different from what we have seen in the four gospels. What he sees is not a baby, but he is one who is pictured as a priest and king. He is portrayed in His soon coming as a ruler with great power and authority. Tony Evans describes this image in this way:

Notably, Jesus in his might and power is situated among the lampstands to signify his visible rulership of the church as Judge and King, even before his second coming to personally and directly rule the entire world (1:13; see 1:20). In other words, before he returns to rule the world, he wants to rule the church. The church, then, cannot view Jesus merely as a gentle figure with long hair and a loving gaze. Christians must view him as a ruler, for there is a judgment side of Jesus along with the blessing side we love to talk about. He is the might

²² Johnson, Darrell W.. *Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation* (p. 42). Canadian Church Leaders Net work. Kindle Edition.

and strength at the center of the church.²³

I find this extremely encouraging. When we, the church, are gathered, Jesus is right in our midst and He has me, His messenger in His hand! This is encouraging and humbling!

²³ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda.

THE ETERNAL STATE

By Dennis Watson

We wrap four years of Connecting the Dots and the Dots Connected and ending with the anticipation of the eternal state. As believers, our everlasting hope is filled with anticipation of being forever with God in the New Heaven and the New Earth. There is no way to fully grasp what it will be like, but I certainly believe that none of us who Know Jesus will be disappointed.

Day 1– Read Revelation 20:11-15

The eternal state is about where people will spend eternity. The Bible does not teach annihilation. Annihilation is the belief that at death a person just ceases to exist. Some believers accept annihilation because they choose not to believe anyone would have to suffer forever. This belief is called annihilationism.

Annihilationism is directly related to the doctrine of Christian conditionalism, the idea that a human soul is not immortal unless it is given eternal life. Annihilationism asserts that God will eventually destroy the wicked, leaving only the righteous to live on in immortality.²⁴

According to the Biblical record, all people will live forever. Those who have received Christ by faith will spend eternity with God in the place He has prepared—Heaven. Those who have rejected God by not placing their faith in His redeeming work will spend eternity in a place prepared for “... the devil and his angels...”

Matthew 25:41 This place is called hell, the place of everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels where those whose name is not written in the Lamb’s book of life will be cast along with the devil and his angels.

²⁴ Article online Wikipedia “Annihilationism”

God is just. This means He is perfectly righteous. There is no wrong in Him. **Gotquestions.org** says this:

Every truth in the universe is God's truth. Every mathematical formula and every scientific law can trace its roots to the character of God. Human knowledge is only a discovery of the truth that already exists. God has hidden nuggets of wisdom in our universe for us to find the way a child finds eggs on Easter. Justice is one such truth that doesn't have a beginning or an explanation. If we were merely evolved bits of pond scum, justice wouldn't make sense. Humans would have no rights, no inner moral code, no desire for the eternal. But, because we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), we have His heart in matters of morality, courage, love, and justice. He is the complete embodiment of traits we only possess in part. He is complete love (1 John 4:16). He is complete goodness (Psalm 106:1). He is complete kindness (Psalm 25:10). And He is complete justice (Isaiah 61:8).

In **Romans 3:26**, we read God is "...just and is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ." Since God is just, sin must be punished and that punishment is death and separation from God. Through Jesus, God places His justice on Jesus so we may be set free of the payment for sin and receive life both abundant and eternal.

There are two judgments to come. The first one is the great white throne judgment which is the judgment of the lost. After their resurrection, they will be judged by their works. This will determine their punishment. They will be judged by whether or not their name is in the Lamb's book of life. If it is not, they will spend eternity in hell.

The second judgment Paul writes about is in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. This is where rewards are mentioned. In 2 Corinthians 5:10,

we read that as believers, we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ which is the 'bema' where rewards will be given out.

Gotquestions.org puts it this way:

The judgment seat of Christ does not determine salvation; that was determined by Christ's sacrifice on our behalf (1 John 2:2) and our faith in Him (John 3:16). All of our sins are forgiven, and we will never be condemned for them (Romans 8:1). We should not look at the judgment seat of Christ as God judging our sins but rather as God rewarding us for our lives. Yes, as the Bible says, we will have to give an account of ourselves. Part of this is surely answering for the sins we committed. However, that is not going to be the primary focus of the judgment seat of Christ.

Tomorrow, we will begin to look at the other side of eternal state. Make sure you have received the life of God through salvation in Jesus Christ.

Day 2– Read Revelation 21:1-6; 2 Peter 3:5-12

New Heaven and New Earth? The Old heaven and the old earth will pass away. What is that all about? Will God really destroy the original? Peter writes about the coming destruction of the earth. He speaks of the flood. There was not total destruction with the flood. The earth was judged and there was destruction, but not a total elimination. The words "burned up" can also mean laid bare. The elements were exposed. In both the Old and New Testament passages, the words for "new" mean "new in respect of freshness," rather than "new with respect to existence." That is, "a new heaven and a new earth" could be properly also translated "a fresh heaven and a fresh earth."²⁵ What we will have is an old earth which will

²⁵ The Revelation Record, Henry Morris

be made new. There will be the removal of all effects of sin and the fall. There will be the removal of death, devastation, and decay. The earth will be new in quality and will be refreshing. The flood waters mentioned in Genesis provided limited purification, but the fire mentioned in Revelation will provide for complete purification of the earth. To some degree, however, the first earth was designed for man's probationary state, whereas, the new earth is equipped for his perfected state.

This will be the restoration of all things which He will make new. Can you try to imagine a place on this earth where everything is always fresh and like new? This is what God will do and what we as His children will forever experience

Day 3– Read Revelation 21:15-21

John saw and wrote about the New Jerusalem which will be the center piece of the New Earth. After God has re-created the New Heaven and the New Earth, He reveals the New Jerusalem as, “Coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband.” **Revelation 21:2** It is the place where God will dwell with His people forever.

God has designed and will build an incredible city. The word city is used 13 times in Revelation 21-22. Each use is in reference to the capital city of the New Heaven and the New Earth. There are different interpretations of the measuring instruments, but I prefer to use the calculations by Randy Alcorn, the author of Heaven, to get a better visual of how large this city will be on the New Earth. He says the city will be a cube 1400 miles in width, height and length. A city this size in the United States would stretch from Mexico to Canada and from the Appalachian Mountains to the border of California. Alcorn goes on to say that if the city has

levels 12 feet high, there would be 600,000 levels which would handle billions of people!²⁶

The size will be incredible, but so will be its adornment. The walls are of Jasper. The twelve gates are one pearl each. The foundations are each of precious stones. The streets are of pure gold like transparent glass and the city will always be open.

All enemies of the Kingdom will be forever cast into the lake of fire, far away from the New Earth. So the gates will remain open, with no need for searches or metal detectors. Any citizen of the New Earth is always welcome, always free to come to the capital city—and even to access the King’s throne! The open gates guarded by angels remind us that our safety has been bought and permanently secured by our God.²⁷

This will be an incredible city!

Day 4– Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-54

Think about why the resurrection is so important. From the beginning of creation, life came from God. In Deuteronomy 30:20, Moses tells the people of Israel the importance of living in connection with Him saying, “For the Lord is your life.” Before Adam and Eve sinned, God told them if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die. This was the beginning of death. Man did not die at that moment, but death and decay entered the perfect creation of God as punishment for sin. The long term consequence of sin was centuries of death and decay.

²⁶ Alcorn, Randy. Heaven (Alcorn, Randy) (p. 250). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

²⁷ Alcorn, Randy. Heaven (Alcorn, Randy) (p. 251). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Adam and Eve were given life and with that life, a physical body. Man cannot be a disembodied spirit, so he had to have a body. Man is body, soul and spirit. He is created in the likeness and image of God. Man is Spirit. God is Spirit. Man's body was suitable for the earthly environment. It was subjected to becoming perishable due to sin.

God subjected all of creation, including mankind, to futility or to brokenness in hope that man would realize their desperate plight and turn to Him. **Romans 8:20**

God sent Jesus to seek and to save lost mankind from sin, futility and death. All of mankind faces the decay, destruction and death which are the results of sin that began with the fall of man. The decaying, dying human needs hope and this hope comes in the form of the resurrection. Jesus died for our sin to remove the eternal consequences. In Jesus, we will experience the resurrection which will provide for believers a spiritual body that fits us for the new heaven and earth. Paul says the body which is sown (buried) will be raised imperishable. 1 Corinthians 15:42 It is sown in dishonor and raised in glory. Ultimately, the body is sown a natural body and will be raised a spiritual body.

Every day we live we grow older and we face mortality, aging, deterioration, diseases and death, but our certainty as believers of life through Christ will be our eternal hope.

Day 5– Read Roman 8:18-30

In **John 14:2**, Jesus tells His disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you.” What a wonderful word of encouragement from Jesus about what He has gone to do and is now doing. Years ago, I read most of Randy Alcorn's book Heaven. If you have never read this book, I highly recommend it. It is not necessarily a read through book from cover to cover. It is more of a reference book on

heaven. Each chapter raises and answers questions about heaven. When I read the book, my mind and imagination was opened to the thrill of heaven. Scripture informs our imagination.

God has great things in store for us in this place called heaven which He has prepared for us. We can use our imagination that is scripturally informed and we can use our glorious experiences here to anticipate how much better and glorious heaven will be. First, think with me of what will not be in heaven. Sin will not be there. God will ultimately make the victory over sin and its consequences an experiential reality. Can you imagine no sin at all!

Not even your own sin that has perhaps plagued you. Not the sin of others. We will not be hampered by the negatives of this fallen world. Sin, decay, destruction and the diminishing of senses will be gone. We will see better, hear better, smell better, taste better, touch better. Our senses will be like us, more alive than ever. Death will not be there because it is the last enemy to be defeated (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death was defeated at the cross, but we will all experience this victory in the resurrection. We will not face death; our own or our loved ones.

There will be no darkness. God will Himself illuminate everything and everywhere. There will not even be shadows because God's light is everywhere. I could go on and on, but I need to bring this to a conclusion.

Now, what will be there? God will be there. He will be our God and we will be His people. We will enjoy His presence, power and peace. Your saved loved ones will be there and, yes, you will know them. The knowing will far exceed our knowing here. We will eat!

What will we be doing? We will be rejoicing. We will see God as He is. We will see His incredible new heaven and new earth and

we will never grow weary of being amazed at all there is. We will not be limited by our earthly limitations. All of our senses will be far more capable of taking in God's beauty and splendor. We will work and enjoy it. Work was not a consequence of sin, but work as a burden was. There will be no burden.

There is no way to express how incredible heaven will be. Paul reminds us that these present sufferings are not to be compared to the glory which will be revealed in us.

Let the truth and the promises of God keep you strong and filled with hope as we anticipate eternal life with Him and with others who know Him.

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." **Colossians 3:1-3**

What an incredible journey we have been on the last four years. From the opening pages of Genesis, we have looked at how God has been the prime mover in human history. He created all things and all people and all nations. He chose for Himself a special people through whom He would make Himself known to all people. We traced His work through the people of Israel all the way to the coming of Jesus into the world through the people God chose as his own. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that was laid down in the Old Testament. The New Testament is about His coming, death and resurrection and the launch of the blessed hope to the whole world.

Now, you and I are the continued work of all of this! God went to incredible God-sized activities to bring the good news of His love and forgiveness to you and to me. Now, what will we do? May all who come behind us find us faithful!

