

Jesus: 7 Key Moments in His Life

Jesus is the Hero of our story. In fact, all of history is His Story. Before the cross it tells us of humanity's fall and of God's ways of preparing us for the Savior to come. Then for a brief moment in time, Jesus left His divine powers behind, took the plunge into earth's pain and darkness, and lived in our midst, becoming forever united to our humanity.



At the cross He single-handedly redeemed us. After the cross and His ascension history reveals His slow, patient way of redeeming humanity through us. It is easy to miss it: easy to look at the world and not see a Creator; easy to look at our history and not see His Story. Seeing Him changes everything. Here are seven extraordinary highlights from His Amazing Story.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation... He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Colossians 1:15, 18-20 ESV

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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CHAPTER ONE

His Eternal Pre-Existence

Jesus didn't suddenly appear on the scene with His birth at Bethlehem. That was when He came to earth as one of us to play the central role in our redemption. But He wasn't waiting in the wings rehearsing His lines! What was the Son of God doing before He became the Son of Man? The clues are scattered across the pages of the Bible like stardust in the heavens.

In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. John 1:1 AMP

Before the Incarnation

Jesus is the Eternal Son of God, having been in existence since before time began. Everything we might know to say about God will be true of Him, if it is true of God. But it is not that simple. His descent to earth changed everything. During His Incarnation He took a break from being God, set His divine attributes aside, and became fully human for 33 years. Now, post-Resurrection, He is right back on "the job" of ruling over the universe with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but with a crazy twist: He is still united to our humanity, having become forever the God-Man. That's going to take some explaining!



There's always more to Jesus than meets the eye, even well-schooled eyes of faith. For now, however, the question before us concerns His life before the Incarnation, specifically in His relationship to Israel.

The extraordinary truth about Jesus' pre-existence is that He didn't just drop in us "out of the blue" when He showed up in Mary's womb, as if He had only been God at a distance up until then. No, He had been intimately involved with Israel from the beginning. There is a natural tendency to suppose that God the Father was "single-handedly" dealing with Israel, keeping Jesus "off stage" waiting for His entrance as Messiah. Seen in this (mistaken) light, all references to God and all appearances and utterances of God in the Hebrew Scriptures are attributed to the Father. But that's not what the gospel tells us.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. John 1:9-11 ESV

This one statement by John makes it clear that—all along—Jesus had been creating, sustaining and redeeming the world, humanity, and Israel especially: "He came to His own." For sheer



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pathos there is nothing to match this: Jesus was the national God of Israel! He came to them visibly and in Person, yet they didn't recognize the One who led them out of slavery, across the Red Sea, into the Promised Land and back from Captivity. He spoke to them through prophets, signs and wonders. Yet, "his own people did not receive him." And worse, they put their own God to death on the cross. We share in that of course—Jesus died for our sins as well—but Israel's tragic blindness shows us how hard it can be to "see" the Lord when He visits us.

Jesus, the Great "I AM"

To open our eyes better, let's review seven monumental sayings of Jesus by which He was trying to open Israel's eyes to who He was (and forever is): the seven "I AM" sayings recorded in the gospel of John. These provocative statements were intentional allusions to the greatest "I AM" statement of all time, the self-revelation of God as He spoke to Moses from out of the burning bush. Unquestionably, Jesus desired to open His listeners' blinded eyes to see Him who was speaking to them as the same One who spoke to Moses then.

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" ...This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Exodus 3:14-15 ESV

The meaning of "I AM" as a name for God is a vast subject in itself, but in essence it means "I will become what I choose to become" and is, therefore, a statement of God's eternal and utter self-existence and uniqueness, His absolute independence from and sovereignty over everything He created. By this we can see that for Jesus to say "I AM" to Biblically educated, believing Jews was "shock therapy." But for us it also opens a window into His activity prior to the Incarnation: what Jesus says He is in the present shows us what He has always been, even though Israel "did not receive Him."

"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." Isaiah 46:3-4 ESV

Seven "I AM" Statements in John

1. The Bread of Life

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35 ESV

As a staff gave power to a man, so the ancients called bread the staff of life, for it gave everyone the strength each day required. Just as Jesus gave the Israelites their daily manna in the wilderness, so too, He gave them (and us) their daily words of heart strengthening encouragement and guidance. We "feed" on His every Word.

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:3 ESV



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2. The Light of the World

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 ESV

In the beginning of creation, Jesus radiated forth the light that God gave to banish the primordial darkness. Jesus was with Israel in the cloud of glory and the fiery pillar, leading them as they came out of Egypt. His wisdom was there to enlighten their understanding all along the way. He has been enlightening our darkness ever since.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. Psalms 36:9 ESV

3. The Gate

"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." John 10:9 ESV

We are at risk whenever we go out into world, besieged as it is by spiritual darkness, but we are also at risk in our homes. That's why the Lord called for Israel to place reminders of their God on their doorposts and their gates—so that, whether they were leaving or returning, they would remember that He was with them and that they were meant to be "with Him" by living faithfully.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore. Psalms 121:7-8 ESV

4. The Good Shepherd

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11 ESV

David epitomized the good shepherd who willingly risks his own life for his flock. He told Saul that, because he had fought off both bear and lion with God's help, he was ready to face down the giant Goliath for Israel's sake. A Greater Shepherd was watching over him. Later, he wrote a psalm in praise of the Shepherd who had been resting, refreshing, and raising him to leadership as Israel's servant king.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. Psalms 23:1-3 ESV

5. The Resurrection and the Life

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26 ESV

Belief in resurrection and eternal life didn't make it in any obvious way into the first five books of the Bible. That's why the Sadducees, who based their faith on Moses' writings alone, were at such odds with the Pharisees, who believed the "writings and the prophets" were also scripture.



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Old Job lived long before their time, yet his words have outlasted them. All he caught was a faith-glimpse of his Redeemer, but he knew he would see Him one Day.

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. Job 19:25-27
ESV

6. The Way, the Truth, and the Life

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 ESV

In making this "I AM" statement Jesus is saying that anyone who finds the right way to live has found it through His direct enabling; anyone who discovers a truth, any truth, has drawn close to His Person; anyone who experiences the quality of life that heaven calls "life," entered into that moment by His grace. God the Father gives these gifts, but we can only enter into them through Jesus' working, just as we can only come to the Father, through His revealing.

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints.
Proverbs 2:6-8 ESV

7. The Vine

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5 ESV

What a beautiful image of fruitfulness vines gave to Israel! Branches heavy-laden with grapes were sure to usher in a harvest, leading to choice wine—the gift and sign of joyful fellowship. Above all, vineyards were a sign of their position in God's heart—Israel was the vineyard He cultivated by prophet, priest and king, as well as by Word and sacrifice. His very life was in their midst! Had they only stayed united to their Vine... how different it might have been.

What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? Isaiah 5:4 ESV



CHAPTER TWO

His Miraculous Birth

If Jesus truly is our Model and Example in everything pertaining to the spiritual life, then His birth has volumes to speak to us about our own new life in Him. Indeed, it does! What it reveals will make you marvel even more at the “risk” He took and the miracle, not only of His birth, but of His unwavering pursuit of His divine assignment.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14 ESV

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 ESV

Looking Beyond the Familiar

Jesus’ birth by the Virgin Mary is the nearly unbelievable miracle that begins two of the gospels, bringing the Son of God to earth in a way no one had ever arrived here before. It is a fitting entrance for so exceptional a Person. But is it also something far more than that? So astonishing is the miracle itself, so captivating the events that surround it, so endearing the images it evokes, that we could easily stop short of seeing its full significance.



Biblical miracles are called “signs and wonders” for a reason. As wonders they are meant to get us wondering, not just in awe, but also in probing meditation; as signs they point to something greater that lies beyond themselves. What does the sign of this virgin birth want us to ponder? Where is it directing our gaze? To the infant, yes, but from what perspective?

Looking to the Infant from earth’s perspective, we see the miraculous in the way He is born of a virgin. Our eyes naturally shift to Mary through whom that miracle occurs, or our attention focuses upon the Babe in His tender vulnerability. Looking from heaven’s perspective, we see the miraculous in what it took for the eternal Son of God to become an infant. Our eyes naturally shift to heaven and it is there that we “see” something even more astonishing going on!

Jesus Emptied Himself!

What about the hidden story behind His miraculous birth, invisible to us, yet stunningly apparent to that host of heaven praising Immanuel on those wintry fields beyond Bethlehem? There is



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something truly astonishing going on behind the scenes that will help us esteem our Lord even more. Not only that, but these insights may give us an entirely new perspective on the surprising ways in which our life of faith is a mirror image of His own. Be ready to pause in wonder, as we seek to unveil just a glimpse of this holy Mystery, the mystery of how it was that the Word became flesh through the "self-emptying" of Jesus Christ.

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.
Philippians 2:5-7 ASV

As near as I can make it out, here is the Why? What? and How? of it...

The Why: Why a Baby?

We take it for granted that He came into the world as a baby, but that wasn't His only option. From a Christian perspective there are numerous sightings of the Lord Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures most notably in His appearance as both "a man" and "Prince of the Lord's hosts" to Joshua just before the battle at Jericho. If He could make an appearance as a divine "man" to Joshua and many others, He certainly could have entered the world of Herod's Israel the same way.

Why didn't Jesus simply step into time and space to begin His mission looking and acting like one of us? Why did He choose to enter our world as a baby instead? Clearly, there were important reasons why He had to become fully human. That could only happen by being born of a woman same as the rest of us. But why? I see two compelling reasons and they both argue for Him not only becoming fully human, but in some "operational" sense, only human:

- 1) He had to become one with us in order to die as our representative at the cross and
- 2) He had to become one with us to regain the dominion authority over the earth that we had ceded to Satan.

To do this Jesus had to "empty" Himself of all that went with being God. Someone put it this way: "Though He was never less than fully God, He lived as never more than only man."

The What: What Was He Emptied of?

No doubt there is much here that needs reverent consideration, but the list is impressive even when filed by title: Jesus chose to empty Himself of His own divine glory, of His rights and privileges, of omnipotence, of omniscience, of omnipresence, and of the fame and adoration He received in heaven. He left behind heaven's beauty, its glory and its matchless fellowship, which included "face to face" intimacy with His Beloved Father.

Think of what a little baby brings into the world by way of knowledge and power and you will see how much like us He truly became. Now, only add to that image an unbroken spiritual connection to the Father (He was born of the Holy Spirit) and only subtract from it a fallen spiritual connection to the enemy (He was born without Adam's sinful nature). This is admittedly

a huge difference from our birth, but it brings His experience of human life amazingly close to our own.

To close the gap even more, God through Jesus provides a way for us to “catch up” with Him. We didn’t begin life with the same spiritual connection to the Father as Jesus, but once we are reborn that loss is fully restored through the gift of the Indwelling Spirit and His union with our own freshly regenerated spirit. At the same time God “crucifies” our “old man.” Through faith-conversion we are severed from the fallen nature and the enemy’s mastery over us that our carnal flesh once enjoyed. By these gifts, we truly “catch up” with Jesus’ human experience.

These realities are descriptive of the invisible realm of spirit and take place within our hidden depths. They are admittedly hard to picture. Hold the image of what a baby’s body offers by the way of powerlessness and what a baby’s mind provides by way of knowledge and you will see well enough how thoroughly the Son of God was emptied!

The How: How Was He "Refilled"?

Luke tells us that Jesus grew in favor with God and man. Long before that He had a tremendous amount of catching up to do with the Person He had always been, the Person the baby would grow to become. God help us not to transgress in our thinking about so hallowed and mysterious a subject as what was transpiring within the infant Jesus. Yet, for Jesus to have honestly and fully become an infant, there could be nothing in the baby’s consciousness that would not be in ours, save for the inchoate sense of connection to Father God and the absence of strident self-will. But where, oh where, were the words?

The Word became flesh by setting words aside! Did not the Babe of Bethlehem have to learn Hebrew word by word? Indeed, we know that it takes time and considerable effort for babies to separate out images, sounds, and feelings and then associate them with ideas, before speech itself can be learned. Did not Jesus have to travel this same path or was His “growth” all just pretense and pretending?

Did He who gave the Word to Israel, not have to learn Truth through the scriptures as a child—same as we who follow Him now? Did He not have to search the scriptures to discover (rediscover) His divine assignment and destiny? Did He not need a faith community to aid His own spiritual formation as we do? Was He not tempted as we are? Did He not have to intentionally stay united to His Father through intimacy and obedience and depend upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and power same as ourselves? He "suffered" the burden of all of these disciplines (so necessary for us as well) and grew mightily.

The Ultimate Temptation

Perhaps the greatest temptation Jesus faced was to draw on His divine side and in so doing forfeit the right to be our representative. Seen in this light every day from His miraculous birth onwards was fraught with hidden perils. How perfect His obedience had to be! His self-emptying choice to become (and remain while on earth) fully human was a direct reversal of the enemy’s temptation to Eve to become like God.

We have all aspired to be the god of our own little worlds (especially in infancy), imposing our wills wherever we could get away with it. Yet, Jesus emptied Himself, choosing to become a

servant to His Father's will each and every moment of His life. Not only that, but His assignment was to live as if He were only human, so that He could complete His high calling at the cross.

What a stupendous irony! Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, was the only child born of Adam who freely chose to be merely human. In this He shows us the way. We may not have received His start, but we who believe have all received the same re-start. Now seek to see how your own self-emptying and graced refilling can mirror His. Go back over the path of His own development and see how He is even now seeking to grow up from a mere babe inside of you into full stature and favor with God and humanity.

It is fitting that Paul, who most clearly reveals the self-emptying of Jesus, would also describe for us the high calling of our own self-emptying: that we may know Him and become like Him.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. Philippians 3:7-8 ESV



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CHAPTER THREE

His Incomparable Life

It is our happy task to be “imitators of Christ.” Jesus said that a disciple fully formed (that’s you and me in the making) will be like his teacher. When it comes to showing us how to live, Jesus really is the Master. Trying to copy His ways from the outside in, however, is a guaranteed formula for frustration and failure. We need to see how He did it from the inside out.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1 ESV

The Imitation of Christ

Truly Jesus lived an incomparable life! No one in the history of the world has ever lived so perfectly, so admirably, or so lovingly. That puts Him head and shoulders above the rest of us, but God isn’t content to leave it there. Our Father is out to conform us to the image of His Son, inviting us to “grow up” into the full stature of what Jesus Himself displayed. One phrase that describes this high calling is the “imitation of Christ.”

“What Would Jesus Do?” is a good question to ask in terms of general orientation, but it can easily lead to misdirection. Unquestionably, we are meant to represent Christ to the world. We are to make Him known both by our



words and by how we live. The believers at Antioch evidently re-presented Christ to their world so effectively that they were derided as Christ-ians—“little Christs.” The church picked the nickname up, dusted it off, and has been wearing it proudly ever since.

Just How Do We Imitate Him?

Yes! We want to be like Christ! But how do we go about doing that? One way certainly is to study the gospels, watching closely how Jesus handled Himself in every situation. This way of looking at the life of Jesus is just like looking at the laws of scripture: it sets the boundaries for how we are to behave. This works for broad outlines, but fails in the details.

We can see, for instance, that He was gracious to many (yet thoroughly reprimanded the Pharisees), was helpful to everyone (except the Syrophenician mother at first), never sinned (though He broke the Sabbath and cleared the Temple with a whip), was ready to heal (but a lot depended on how people reacted to Him), could easily do miracles, and had no trouble casting out demons (even from people who didn’t want to be free). How do you “copy” that? His incomparable life cannot be duplicated by striving to reproduce the outward form of it!



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It would take perfect memory to recollect and perfect judgment “apply” the right response of Jesus to every person and every circumstance you encounter. The problem is that you won’t be in any of His circumstances. You are going to be in all kinds of situations that have no obvious Biblical counterpart. We see only limited selections from three years of Jesus’ life in ancient Israel. The most we can do is try to find universal principles by studying His life and then seek to apply them to ours. Again, this is good for setting boundaries, but it will fail us in the complexities of daily living.

Not Another Law!

The real problem, however, with this approach to the imitation of Christ is that it throws everyone who attempts it back on trying to keep laws in their own strength. "Law keeping" is the very thing that the gospel has come to liberate us from doing! If I am studying Jesus’ life from the outside, then His words and actions become a new set of laws for me to try to interpret and apply. That makes me a New Testament believer who is just as “law-bound” as the Jewish believers who were trying to interpret and apply the Old Testament laws. Wow! That’s an easy one miss.

We have been set free from the Law of the Old Testament, not so that we can be immoral (and break the Law), or so that we can adopt new rules of our own. Our freedom from law-keeping liberates us to trust and follow the One who set us free! When we yield to Jesus, He leads us by His peace and by His Spirit. “Walking in the Spirit” is our new and living way of fulfilling the Law. In this way Jesus navigates us through the thorny problem of finding the right thing to do in each situation we face. We simply follow His lead in childlike simplicity one step at a time.

Everyone who surrenders their life to Jesus in this way, knows exactly what the gospel is describing as “walking in the Spirit” or “abiding in Christ.” Experiencing this requires our willingness to be “crucified with Christ.” If we are not willing to take up the cross of self-denial as needed (Jesus said “daily”), we won’t be able to follow Jesus in this way. Those who don’t want to surrender all, never understand or experience this. They go back to law-keeping in one form or another. Please, don’t let that be you!

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Luke 9:23-24 ESV

The New and Living Way

As our Example, Jesus showed us how to live our lives. Unquestionably, He lived within the moral boundaries and even told us to do the same, distilling the Old Testament’s hundreds of laws into [two great commandments](#). But did Jesus Himself live by law-keeping? You might be surprised what He had to say about it.

Jesus was explicit on many occasions recorded in John’s gospel that His focus was not on the Law, but on the Lord of the Law—His Father. He stated emphatically that He always kept His eyes on the Father, only did what He saw the Father doing, and only spoke as He heard the Father speaking. In love He conformed Himself to the guidance that He was receiving directly from the Father.

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise." John 5:19 ESV

Through faith-conversion, our God has come to us in a very similar way. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus, yield in trust to Him as He did to the Father, and then follow Jesus' leadings by His Spirit just as He followed the Father's leadings. Little children do this by an unconscious grace. Jesus said that if we want to enter into His Kingdom way of living, we would have to become like little children all over again. This way of entry into Kingdom life on earth—not just access to heaven in the end—is what the new birth makes possible. Listen to how Paul put it:

For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die. Galatians 2:19-21 NLT

Finding Life through Death?

Paul says that through Jesus he "died to the law" and actually stopped trying to keep it. This surely means that we are not supposed to be "keeping laws" either. We are not to keep the new laws of the New Testament by trying to keep them, any more than we are to keep the Old Testament laws by self-effort. Nor are we meant to imitate Jesus as if His actions were a new law to interpret and apply. We do not worship and serve the Law. We trust in and follow the Lord of all laws—Jesus! Follow Paul's thought into the next sentence and it is clear that the new life comes to life in us (so to speak) whenever we trust in, cling to and rely on Jesus.

The way we imitate Jesus is, therefore, by this interior orientation of the heart to continually surrender to and submit to Him in trust and obedience. This is how Jesus tells us He lived His life—in intentional surrender and submission to the Father, moment by moment. Are we "above" our Master? How could any other mode of life possibly be described as living as He lived, or walking with God as He walked with God?

This new and living way alone brings the flow of peace and other fruit of the Spirit which transforms us from the inside out. It also enables us to follow a path through our very complex, modern lives that is led by the Spirit step by step—no matter how active or demanding our circumstances may be. If we choose to trust and follow Jesus moment by moment, we will be living in imitation of Jesus' own way of living. Our lives will inevitably become as Holy Spirit filled, empowered and overflowing with love as His own: His incomparable life will be released through us like a river once the dam has broken!

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-25 ESV



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CHAPTER FOUR

His Terrible Death

No one could see it at the time. Jesus had to descend into the abyss of suffering and sin without a guide to lead Him through it, or a friend to cheer Him on. How it must have looked to everyone who knew Him like a colossal mistake, a ghastly travesty of justice. In reality it was the most noble and valiant conquest of a hideous foe—all that is fallen and corrupt in our nature. The innocent Victim became the invincible Victor, even before He died!

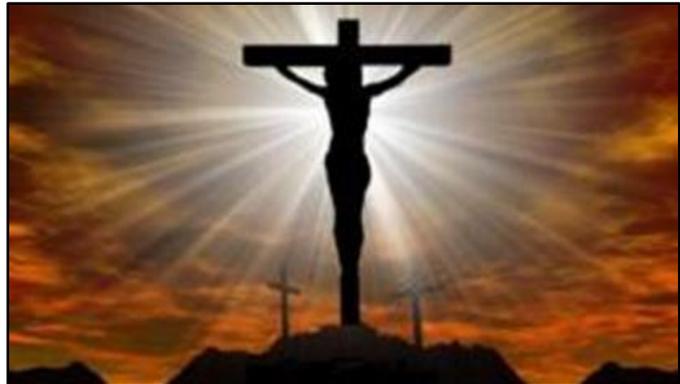
“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” John 10:17-18 ESV

How Far We Fell

There are three ways to attempt to see how far we have fallen into sin:

1) There is the view from the top. With our imaginations aided by divine revelation we can look at created human nature as it existed in Adam and Eve on the high ground of holiness before the fall.

Innocence, purity, intimacy with God, mind-body-soul in perfect harmony—all lost! Lost even beyond the capacity of unredeemed humanity to believe it ever existed.



2) There is the long way back up. We can observe how extraordinarily difficult is the climb back to even a semblance of restored purity of heart, of freedom from sin, of health and well-being, of an unbroken flow of love, joy and peace, to say nothing of living once again in the unveiled presence of our God. There's such a long way to go.

These views are from our perspective. But there is another view. It is God's perspective.

3) There is the broken heap at the bottom. We can look to the cross to see how much it cost Jesus to reverse the direction of the curse, by meeting us at the very depth of our fallenness—at the place where our sins would have plunged us into their awful penalty. Looking at the sufferings of Jesus during His terrible death enables us to see what God had to do from His perspective to deal with the terrible consequences of our fall from His grace.



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Take this journey slowly. Allow time to let it sink in. With each of the steps you may want to breathe out this prayer: “Dear Lord, forgive me that this is what You had to suffer because of me.” Then follow it with this one, “Thank You, Jesus, that You were willing to suffer all of this for my sake!”

What Jesus Suffered

Let your heart meditate on what Jesus had to endure because of our sins.

1. The Suffering in His Body

a) In the early stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His body... all that human cruelty could devise as torment. His body was bruised by beatings from the guards—brutal men who enjoyed inflicting pain. He was torn by the whipping that ripped His flesh, laying bare His bones. A crown of thorns was pressed like spikes onto His head. The hard weight of the cross beam (estimated at 100 pounds) was an agony to carry after these punishments. Then came the piercing of the nails (large spikes) through feet and hands and the wrenching effect on Him as He was lifted upon the cross. Finally, not least, there was the agony of crucifixion itself—gasping for breath, heart strain, and the cramping of all His muscles. The cross was designed by the Romans to torture its victims to death.

But that was just the beginning of His physical sufferings.

b) In the latter stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His body... physical pains and ailments that the Author of health had never known. Isaiah revealed that the Messiah would carry within Himself our sicknesses and our diseases. This would have included our wasting illnesses and afflictions in all of their dreadful forms. Our pains, fevers and piercing agonies were all in the cup from which He drank.

2. The Suffering in His Soul

a) In the early stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His soul... all that human sinfulness could heap upon Him. He suffered reproach and insults along with vile and baseless accusations from those who surrounded Him. He felt the rejection of those He had served, the hatred of those He loved (all of us), and scorn by those He had tried to reach. He fully experienced the pains of betrayal, abandonment and intense loneliness.

But that was just the beginning of the sufferings in His soul.

b) In the latter stage of making atonement Jesus suffered in His soul... thoughts and feelings the sinless One had never known as His own—except as temptations to be spurned. On the cross it was necessary for Him to be made one with our sins. He suffered the feeling of our kind of anger which has such hatred in it. He knew within Himself our sullen bitterness as hard and implacable as rocks; our lust that craves pleasure and is never satisfied; our untrusting fears, anxieties, and terrors that destroy all peace; our ugly prejudices spawned by ignorance and contempt; our heartless apathies that abandon hope and embrace despair; our loneliness that reeks with self-pity; our jealousies and envies that love nothing but their own self-seeking; and our pride



and ambition in all of their scheming forms. Jesus experienced for the first time in His life the unspeakably foul thoughts and feelings of our sin nature.

But was this His final and most terrible suffering? No, there was worse to come.

3. The Suffering in His Spirit

This is a mystery so deep we can barely lift the veil.

a) In the first stage of suffering in His Spirit Jesus began to bear not the experience of what our sin is like, but the awful consequence of our sins. Sin darkens, deadens and defiles and destroys all that it touches. His incomparable understanding began to be darkened. We live in semi-darkness—stunned by moments of enlightenment; now the Enlightened One was stunted by our darkness. His inward vitality began to wither and die. We are half dead to the glory of each moment, thrilled at being quickened by His Spirit; now the Spirit-filled One was experiencing our deadness. Defilement by sin is normal for us — holiness and purity are rarely experienced; now the Holy One of God was experiencing the staining of our defilement. His inner peace began to be destroyed by the crushing weight of sin. He who knew no sin was made to be sin.

Yet, these evils were as nothing compared to the most terrible suffering of all... This may well have been the suffering Jesus saw in the cup the Father showed Him in dark visions at Gethsemane. Here was the ultimate punishment, the suffering that He would have set aside, if only the Father in all His love and wisdom could have devised another way to save us. But there was no other way to reverse our fall.

b) In the second stage of the suffering in His Spirit Jesus faced the unimaginable—unimaginable for Him and unimaginable surely for us. He received within Himself the horror of sin's ultimate penalty. Jesus began to experience for the first time in all the eons of uncreated time, total separation from the Father's loving presence. There! There is the thing He dreaded most: Cut off from God!

His Greatest Agony

Sin separates us from God. It destroys our vision of God. It destroys our communion with God. It destroys our intimacy of conversation with God. It separates us from the blessed presence of God. This is the deepest agony of His travailing prayer at Gethsemane. This is at the heart of His cry of dereliction at the cross. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

He who had never known the slightest separation from His Father finally bore our sins to the point of being identified with us in our separation. Even in our darkest, loneliest moments we only experience this separation in part—we are covered by so much love, surrounded by so much grace that the pain of our separation is cushioned. He suffered in its sheer, dreadful totality. Gone now was the all-consuming embrace of divine love. It was still flowing ever outwards, but Jesus was cut off, stricken for our sins, seemingly forever exiled from the presence of pure love and perfect, joy-filled fellowship. This is an anguish our minds simply cannot fathom.



These terrible sufferings were in the cup that Jesus drank from at the cross. What of suffering, or sin, or sorrow has been in your cup? Know that He has already drained it all for you—and blazed the pathway out!

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

The Final Word

The sufferings Jesus endured — as terrible as they were—didn't get to have the last word. He did! When it was all over, when He had completely drained the cup His Father offered Him, Jesus declared His great Work finished! Only then did He freely surrender His Spirit to God and leave for Home in triumph.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:30 ESV



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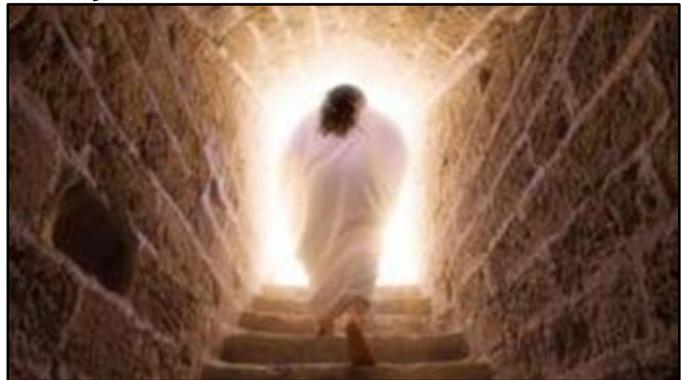
CHAPTER FIVE

His Triumphant Resurrection

Without the resurrection we have no religion worth shouting about, no hope of heaven, no escape from our sins or our sin nature. Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we wouldn't have a living and Risen Lord to know and to follow. Without His resurrection we wouldn't even know how powerful a victory was won by the cross. Where would our faith be then? Funny thing is, it was the one thing He didn't do...

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26 ESV

Because life and death issues are so dear (and fearful) to us, we really need to know for certain that we have a Savior in Jesus of true resurrection power and experience to count on. His triumphant resurrection is intended to free us from all fear of death, as well as bring to us a whole host of other divinely inspired benefits.



That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2:14-15 ESV

Facing the FACTS

Believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not optional for a Christian. It is the defining thing about us. That Jesus rose from the grave means that the Savior of the world is Alive. This is the first astounding FACT on which our faith is built. The second flows from it: This Risen Lord can be known by faith. This too is a FACT. By fact I mean that these are indisputable truths for those who have had their spiritual eyes opened to the eternal Reality that surrounds us, comparable to knowing that there is a sun in the physical heavens encircling the earth. On these two FACTS all of Christian believing is established.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone upon which we build all of our understanding of the world we live in. Every scripture, every event, every person, is now interpreted through the lens of these two outstanding FACTS: Jesus is alive and can be known!

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 ESV



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Suppose Jesus were Risen and, yet couldn't be made known to us? Everything that the gospel and the Bible asks us to believe would be a stretch, requiring huge "leaps" of faith on our part. Because He is risen AND can be known, everything else we need to believe becomes far more readily believable. By receiving genuine faith in Jesus, we "know that we know that we know" that He is alive and that He is Lord. This settles a lot of issues.

For instance, if Jesus can be known by anyone (ourselves for instance), then He can (theoretically) be known by everyone. They must be told! It also follows that because Jesus can be known, every denial of faith by skeptics and atheists is exposed as a lie promoted by people who have no real desire to seek God. We know that all who truly seek Him will find Him (or be found by Him as the case may be). Not only that, but all who believe in a different deity than Jesus Christ and the One He calls Father are shown to be tragically deceived. There is only One Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Along with Father and Holy Spirit, He is God all by Himself. There are no other gods besides Him. These are the new facts.

Look at the Disciples

So important is the Resurrection that the disciples were not even called "believers" until after they received faith in the Resurrection. Unquestionably, what the Holy Spirit inspired and anointed Peter to preach on Pentecost Day was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it... This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Acts 2:23-24, 32 ESV

Please note what Peter didn't preach. The one thing that Jesus didn't do for us in His great Work of saving us through His life, death and resurrection, was resurrect Himself. The New Testament writers are unanimous in attributing the Resurrection to the Father, not Jesus. They saw this as the Father's vindication of His Son. Jesus was innocent of all charges leveled against Him, He truly bore our sins as a spotless Passover Lamb, and the powers of darkness were stripped of their legal authority. It also proved that the entire plan for our salvation was the Father's initiative. The Father attested to all of this by raising Jesus from the dead, openly rewarding Him with a Name above every name and further exaltation in Glory. The resurrection was the Father's Master Stroke, unmistakably revealing His Hand upon His Son's entire mission of salvation.

The significance of this is important for us to grasp, since we are to be raised the same way. Just as Jesus hoped in God, so do we. Just as Jesus put no effort of His own into being raised from the dead, neither do we. Just as He committed His Spirit to the Father, for the Father to raise Him up from death, so do we. Just as the Father raised Jesus and bestowed upon Him a glorified Body and an eternal inheritance, so we too will receive a glorified body and an inheritance in heaven. All of this will happen with no effort on our part, but to trust and believe. Jesus' triumphant resurrection shows us the way to enter into the same triumphant resurrection that the Father offers us.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be



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united with him in a resurrection like his... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:4-5, 11 ESV

How Faith in this FACT Affects Us

Faith in the [Resurrection](#) carries over into all manner of things in this life as well. Paul says that just as Jesus was raised by the glory of the Father, so too, we are raised in “newness” of life. As we by faith grow to see the glorious love that Jesus and God have for us, this faith vision is used by God to raise us again and again out of our captivity to darkness into greater light and freedom. Please see [Beholding the True Image](#) for understanding how God “raises” us into His higher, peace-filled way of living by getting us to look through the veil of circumstances and get our eyes back on our glorious Lord.

These seven benefits of faith in the Resurrection are appropriately shown us by Peter, who was the first to preach on the Resurrection. (See 1 Peter 1:3-9 in the Scripture section below.)

1) A New Birth

Through forgiveness and regeneration, we are “new creations.”

2) A Living Hope

No need to fear death—our hope cannot die.

3) An Imperishable Inheritance

This is kept in heaven for us. Our eternal future is secure.

4) A Salvation Yet to Come

There is a glorious destiny that awaits us.

5) A Love for Jesus

No earthly love can compare with loving and being loved by God.

6) A Joy that Is Filled with Glory

When our faith is activated, joy springs to life.

7) The Salvation of Our Souls

Even now our inner life can experience true peace and freedom.



What about Us?

As it was for the disciples, faith in the resurrection is our key of entrance to the new life God desires to give us. Because it is so important and because we have an enemy who tirelessly attempts to undermine our faith, let's focus on two ways to establish this FACT as a convinced belief in our hearts.

1) Searching for the Truth

The basic strategy is to fill your head with truth while praying it into your heart. When truth reaches your heart, revelation has come. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. Our part is in the searching to discover the truth. Be honest about your doubts, but not with the intention of defending your doubts, but of sincerely seeking to move beyond them into truth. Bring your doubts and reservations to the scriptures and to those in the faith community around you who truly believe. There are many good explorations of the facts concerning Jesus' resurrection which will absolutely convince any honest skeptic. Combined with even a little openness to faith in Jesus, they will destroy all doubts. (See the three companion articles, beginning with Resurrection Proof: The Empty Tomb)

2) Seeking the One Who Is Truth

You cannot know truth fully until you open your heart to God, because God is the ultimate Truth to be known and His life enters into and "informs" all truth. Therefore, the most powerful way to become convinced of the Resurrection is to live for Jesus. The Lord promises that He will allow you to find Him if you seek Him with your whole heart. This doesn't just apply to a one-time conversion experience. Seeking to know Him includes seeking His will and His help in each and every situation you face that holds anything of a problem or temptation for you. The more you cling to Him and call upon His Name, the more you will be able to see Him prove His power and presence to you. It's that simple!

Most of us entered into faith in our Risen Lord by calling on Him for mercy and saving help. Our need for Him didn't end with being saved for heaven. That's just the beginning. The more you learn to lean on Him, the more convinced you will become that He is alive and well. That's a FACT!



CHAPTER SIX

His Glorious Ascension

This one gets overlooked. It seems almost like an afterthought, appended to the earth-shaking events of death and resurrection. A lovely way for the Lord to make an exit. Don't underestimate how important it is that Jesus ascended! Suppose He had stayed down here? Wouldn't you? Why didn't He? There is something crucial in this to know; even more, it is vital that we learn to live by it. His glorious ascension was for our sake as well as His.

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. Luke 24:50-51 ESV

What Might Have Been

The Ascension of Jesus Christ carries tremendous consequences for us and also provides an important focus for our faith-vision of our Risen Lord. Because it is recorded in the Bible, it is readily accepted by believers, but suppose (for a minute) that God's plan for our salvation didn't include raising Jesus *all the way* to heaven. Suppose the Father only raised Jesus "above ground" so to speak, by restoring Him to life on earth. That's a genuine resurrection too. What difference would that have made?



His Deity

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead would have lost much, if not all, of its life-transforming power for us without the Ascension following it up. Lazarus was raised from the dead, too. So was the widow of Nain's son. So were several people in the Old Testament. Come to think of it, so were multitudes in Jerusalem following the earthquake that took place during the crucifixion of Jesus. What would the resurrection of Jesus to life "above ground" have proved, had He not been raised visibly all the way to heaven?

There were elements about Jesus' resurrection appearances and His Resurrection Body that differed in the details from others who have been restored to life. He could pass through walls and show up unexpectedly even when great distances had to be covered. Nevertheless, the conclusive proof, even in Peter's Pentecost sermon, that Jesus' resurrection carried unprecedented significance was in His visible and astounding ascension. All Israel was to "know for certain" that Jesus is Lord and Christ because God raised Him from death "into the heavens" where He sits at the right hand of God.



This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Acts 2:32-36 ESV

Just as we know from the scriptures that the “fame” of Jesus spread quickly around Galilee as His ministry increased, so too we can safely assume that the “rumor mill” in ancient Jerusalem thrived on gossip about the Messiah, any messiah. Those who listened to Peter, no doubt, had previously heard the many rumors about this presumed messiah’s death, resurrection and ascension. Since the Ascension took place on the Mount of Olives in plain view of the Temple Mount, it is possible, even likely, that more people than His inner circle saw Jesus ascend “into the heavens.” Now, Peter is telling them that the rumors are true! He and the others on whom the Holy Spirit had just been so generously (and loudly) poured out are eye witnesses of it all

His Work

His glorious ascension proves more than Jesus' deity as “Lord and Christ.” It inevitably points to the uniqueness of His death as a sacrifice for our sins. Because the Ascension showed the disciples that Jesus is both “Lord and Christ,” they further studied the scriptures to learn more about His divine assignment as Messiah (Christ). Remember that even up to His Ascension the disciples were still stuck on thinking that Jesus had come as Messiah to establish an *earthly* kingdom.

Those persistent presuppositions were forever shattered when He left them behind without accomplishing what they expected their Messiah to do. Why then had He come? Casting about to understand their error, the sin-bearing passages in Isaiah about God’s suffering Servant would have taken on new meaning for them as they do for us.

Our Need

Because Jesus ascended we are all on a level playing field. Had He remained on earth, He could have launched the early church under His direct, visible leadership. That would have been a tremendous benefit, right? Not necessarily. Assuming that He would have died later (or been murdered by His enemies all over again), then all Christians who came later would feel at a great disadvantage from the first century believers who would have all known Jesus “in the flesh” and who would have been taught directly by Him. This would have crippled all succeeding generations of the church from pressing in to recover or go beyond the gains of the first century believers. We would all-too-easily make the mistake of thinking it was better or easier for them because they knew Jesus in the flesh. That’s not what Jesus believed!

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.
John 16:7 ESV

OK, but what if He didn’t die? What if He remained alive on earth and was still visibly present here directing all our operations personally? Wouldn’t that be better? In no way! Even setting

aside the impossible problem this would have created for world evangelism, it would have been counter-productive in terms of our own life and growth. Please see [The Indwelling Presence](#) for more on this intriguing question.

What Ascension Means

1) The Holy Spirit's Descent

You can almost hear how urgent this was to the Lord in the passage quoted above. Jesus knew He had to *ascend* so that the Holy Spirit could *descend*. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit wasn't already active upon the earth—He is the Giver and Sustainer of life to all creatures on the planet, including us. Nevertheless, faith-conversion opens the way for the Holy Spirit to “descend” into our hearts (the deepest, darkest place in the world) and upon our lives (see [New Life in the Power of the Spirit](#)).

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." John 16:4-13 ESV

Jesus said that He must go so that the Spirit of truth can come—to lead us into all truth. There are “many things” Jesus has to say to us, but He can only do it by the Spirit who speaks uniquely and individually into our depths. What Jesus has to reveal to each of us includes who we are apart from Him and who we are united to Him. He comes by His Spirit to reveal ourselves to ourselves as well as to reveal God to us. This cannot be done in a classroom setting—it evidently takes the Holy Spirit speaking to us in the hidden depths of our hearts.

2) Jesus' Intercession

In being raised to the Father's right hand, Jesus is in the perfect position to intercede for us. This must be immensely important for it is mentioned several times in scripture. Our conversation, whether of prayer, petition or praise can be instantaneous. He gives us a standing invitation to “come boldly” to the throne of grace and receive mercy and help anytime we need it.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Romans 8:34 ESV

3) Jesus' Presence

From heaven He can be with all of us by His Spirit. We don't have to go looking Him for in Timbuktu or wait for Him to come our way from His latest visit to Siberia. We are even in some real, though mysterious, sense “seated with Him in the heavenlies.” This means that He is always dwelling in us on earth by His Spirit and we are always dwelling with Him through our spiritual “ascent” into the heavenlies. At the very least that should assure us that we are well connected to our Source of life and grace.



4) Jesus' Preparations

From heaven, He can prepare the earth for His final coming. His return, however, will stop the salvation clock. No one will have any time left to make a decision. Therefore, Jesus remaining in heaven (for the time being) ensures that everyone down here has the opportunity to be drawn to faith if they are willing. It also ensures that He has plenty of time on His Hands to do what He told the disciples He was heading Home to do: prepare a place for us.

5) Our Faith-Vision

Because our hearts hold images so powerfully, it makes a difference if our heart reflexively looks to Jesus as dying on the cross, or as being “back there” still walking through the pages of scripture in ancient Israel. No! He is Alive! He has ascended far beyond the cross. He is not primarily suffering for us right now, He is rejoicing over us and putting plans in place for each moment coming up and arranging a place in heaven for our ultimate arrival there—among many other things. You and I need to fix our eyes on an ascended, fully glorified Lord, the One who has power in every instant to come to our aid: Jesus Christ!

6) Jesus' Glorification

It is only right that after doing so terrible and noble a Work at His request that the Father would unhesitatingly want to raise Jesus all the way to the highest position of Glory and enthronement. Such is the Father's desire to reward His Only Begotten Son.

According to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:19-23 ESV



CHAPTER SEVEN

His Coming Again

You don't have to wait for Jesus to return to experience the peace and power of His reign. His Kingdom comes whenever we trust and obey Him as Lord. But even that can't hold a candle to what it will be like when the Light of the World returns to establish His Kingdom on earth forever. There are incontrovertible signs that the long-awaited Day is closer than you might think. Prepare to be very excited by this...Jesus actually expects us to discern the "signs of the times."

He [Jesus] answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. Matthew 16:2-3 ESV

The "End of the Age" Is Drawing Near

The "end of the age", also known as "the last days", are not the end of the world. The truth is that this end is essentially a new beginning. That should not surprise us.

We have already experienced a precursor of this. In order for God to make us "new creations" He had to bring to death the "old man." Through spiritual rebirth The Father made us new in Christ, but the day of our conversion was hardly our "last day" or the "end of our life" on earth.

God amazingly restored us to who He had originally created us to be and then united us to His Spirit, giving us new birth, new life and freedom from captivity to the fallen nature and the enemy's dominion over us. Old things "passed away" and "all things" were made new. Something similar is coming to the earth as a whole!



Signs of the Times

Concerning the return of the Lord two things are beyond dispute in the text of scripture:

- 1) The day is surely coming when the Lord will return to bring an end to the present age.
- 2) It is very important that believers stay watchful for His return.



Stay awake and aware. It is anticipated in scripture that in the last days (before His coming) many will cease believing and expecting this promise of God to be fulfilled—they will be caught unprepared. Hence, the repeated warnings to stay alert and prepared.

I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." ... But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Peter 3:1-4, 8-9 ESV

Concerning the timing of His return, Jesus Himself makes a clear distinction between signs that are clearly meant to show believers that His return is drawing near and the day and hour which will remain a hidden thing. He fully expects that we will know that it is near—at the doors, but we are not to press Him for the exact moment. This foretold lack of exactness is why our new life is characterized by awaiting His return with eager watchfulness.

- 1) **Dates and hours**—the exact moment of His Coming is withheld from all.
- 2) **Times and seasons**—the near approach of His Coming will be known by many.

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come." Mark 13:28-34 ESV

The teaching of St. Paul lines up perfectly with the teaching of Jesus. For people of the world there will be a complacent attitude that life is going on as usual. Unaware of the times and the seasons, they will not be watching and preparing for the return of Christ.

Instead, they will be surprised and overwhelmed like people suddenly awakened (too late!) by a thief in the night. But it is quite different for people of faith who have no need of further instruction concerning the return of the Lord. The clear implication is that they will be awake and alert to the times and seasons and will not be surprised when the Day finally arrives.

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light,

children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 ESV

Unprecedented Signs of Christ's Return

There are unmistakable signs on the horizon. None of the following signs were in place prior to the middle of the past century. Up until very recently no one looking for Biblical signs of the Lord's return would have been in a position to say His return was drawing near. Conversely, the convergence of these signs (many of which had been unthinkable possibilities in the past) point inexorably to the knowledge that Jesus said His church would have about the season of His return. These signs can be grouped as follows:

Jewish Signs It is a mark of God's faithfulness that He never forgets, but always fulfills, His promises and His purposes. Long before Jesus came to earth, God chose the Jewish people to be in a unique covenant relationship with Himself. This was certainly intended for their benefit, but also for ours: Ultimately the long-awaited Savior would come to them, then through them to us. Guess what? He is getting things ready to do it again!

Gospel Signs Jesus gave us this sign, but Peter explained it. He wrote in 2 Peter 3:1-9 that the Father is in no hurry to bring things to a quick close because He doesn't want anyone to be perish, but all to come to repentance. For that to happen the gospel has to be preached to all the world. That day is coming at us like a freight train...

Global Signs When the Bible was being written the "world" to its authors was no larger than the Mediterranean basin and outlying provinces, mostly under Roman control. Before the entire world could be organized into anything like the unified whole pictured in the Book of Revelation, it first had to be explored, then subdued. When these signs were given, they were unthinkable possibilities; now they are everyday realities. Well, almost all...

