

Our Awesome Destiny (1993)

The Kingdom of God

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Please turn with me to Matthew 25. I had not intended to start with this verse, but I got into a very brief conversation regarding this, and I think that it would be good to begin here because what this is describing I do not want to occur to us.

Matthew 25:1-4 Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

What we can see here, of course, is a story that Christ is picturing to us of what is going to be going on in the church at the end time. This parable is sandwiched in between many exhortations to use the time that we have now to get ready for His return.

He is telling us to be alert, to be watching, to be praying always so that we might be accounted worthy to escape all these things. He tells us what the times are going to be like. He also tells us what we need to be doing in order to be prepared for the times. In addition, it seems almost incongruous that what He is picturing here in the Parable of the Ten Virgins would even come to pass and yet, understanding a little bit of psychology, it is understandable.

Because what happens when times become really difficult and we are pressured from every side—we are being hit by stresses from the street, stresses from the economy, stresses within the family, stresses within the church, stresses within our own lives and the things we are doing, stresses with our health—all these things begin to work on us and, the result is apathy.

The natural tendency is not to become exuberant, or energized, but rather it is to hide oneself from it and go into a state of spiritual stupor, which Christ is showing here.

What is so amazing about this is that the very people who should be the most wide awake, Christ pictures them as being asleep.

Here is the interesting part:

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Matthew 25:5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

The whole church! I would have to say it could be interpreted as that, and that means you and me. We all went to sleep to some degree, while some are more asleep than others, and some are more easily awakened than others. But, at some time, and to some degree, the whole church went to sleep at the most critical time in terms of getting ready for His return, because that is what this parable is about. These people were sleeping while they were awaiting the Bridegroom's return.

In verse 9 after everybody awoke, and the foolish asked the wise for help, the wise answered:

Matthew 25:9-10 But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

You are probably getting the picture, and I hope that you are getting it clearly, that this is John Ritenbaugh's concern—getting the church ready. I do not know how much time we have left. I only know that all of these parables that Christ gave following what was given in Matthew 24, have something to do with being alert, being ready, and growing and overcoming, and something to do with service. I have given you the subject of these four parables that were given here in Matthew 24 and 25.

My concern is that we be ready for when He comes. I know this: I feel confident that if His coming is delayed longer than we think we would like it to be, that He will use our preparation in some way that will be a benefit to Him. It will open the door, and show us the way that He wants us to use our preparation so that it will be of value to Him, and to us, until that time comes for Him to send His Son. I can guarantee you that whatever that work happens to be, we will be busy doing it, and we will be doing a good job in doing it because we will be prepared, and He will take advantage of that.

With that thought in mind, let us go back to the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon was musing upon the things that he found to be important in life, and every once in a while he would reach a conclusion, and so he says:

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Ecclesiastes 8:16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night .

..

He really put his mind into this; he really put his time and energy into it. And, even though he says that somebody does not get much sleep, they spend all their waking hours thinking about this.

Ecclesiastes 8:17 Then I saw all the work of God that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun . . .

We know from an earlier reference to much the same thing that he is talking about what God is doing—what is His work? What is all of this going on earth for? What is the purpose of life? Why are things the way they are? Why is life so meaningless?

Ecclesiastes 8:17 . . . For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

Ecclesiastes 9:1 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God [God knows what He is doing]. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.

Think of that in relation to the sermon given this morning, “Who is teaching our children?” Where are they getting their values of right and wrong? They do not have it because they are getting their values from the wrong source. Where men basically are getting it from is history, and the Bible says that people can know neither love, good, hatred, nor evil from what has gone on before, because the history of man is so confusing, and there are so many ideas out there that everybody is at odds and ends as to what is right and wrong.

Last evening I asked all of us to be committed with all our being in a manner similar to the founding fathers who pledged their lives, fortunes, and their sacred honor. But to what are we specifically pledging all of this to?

Solomon confirms, here, what is later made very clear in the New Testament: that no

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one can come to the Son except the Spirit of the Father draws him (John 6:44). In other words, the purpose that God is working out is such a mystery that it cannot be penetrated even by the closest scrutiny by the most discerning of carnal men. They can turn all their intellect to all this, they can review all the history of man, and yet they cannot come up with the purpose that is being specifically worked out now in our time—and will be worked out in theirs.

It is an enigma; a riddle. More than a riddle, it is something that is so deep that it cannot be penetrated.

Most people go through life with a wistful yearning to know what is going on. I do not mean that it is something that is always with them—that it is the only thing that they ever think of—but I am talking rather more of a subconscious frustration because life seems to have little direction other than the pursuit of material and secular goals.

That is why Solomon adds this in Ecclesiastes 3:

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts . . .

In other words, there is a desire in everybody to know what is going to happen. It is a natural thing for people to be interested in prophecy. Everybody yearns to know what is just around the corner, just a little bit out of view. Many people want to know just what is going to happen regarding the things that can be seen, such as Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia. Where is this going to end? People are wondering if it will trigger the Third World War, like they did in the First World War.

People wonder what is the end of the events happening in South Africa. Are we going to see that whole nation erupt in flames? Is all the white population going to be wiped out down there, just overrun by the black population? What is going to happen there? Is Japan going to rise and again overrun the islands of the Pacific, and find a beachhead into Australia, which they have had their eyes upon for a very long time? There is room for expansion down there.

Is Germany going to once again launch a thrust to the East, and try to take Poland? Will they try to go into Russia and do something that they have tried in the past? Are they going to try to make a Rapallo-like treaty? Germany has, historically, done this. Before

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they attack, they made a treaty with Russia to try and tie Russia's hand, while they try to work out some scheme in Eastern Europe.

People want to know these things. It is natural.

Everybody wants to know if there is a God, and what is He doing? I do not care if you are Mongolian, or a Tibetan, or Sri Lankan, or whatever you happen to be, there is within people a desire for eternity. People want to live forever, and they want to know the direction that life is headed. So, God has put eternity in their hearts,

Ecclesiastes 3:11 . . . except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

So, what mankind sees and Solomon records at the beginning of this chapter is an endless and repetitious cycle of events occurring throughout history: there is a time for this; a time for that; a time for that thing over there; this is going to happen to that person; and a few year later that same thing is going to happen to the person that the other thing happened to before. The same things basically happen to all men, though they happen at different times.

Life has a frustrating repetition to it, and it never seems to end in the right way. And so there is this mostly unfulfilled yearning to know how events and their lives are going to work, and where life itself is headed. But, the answers are not given to you.

We are here at this Feast of Tabernacles because we believe that God has commanded this. He has commanded this particular feast to be an annual reflection on where each person's life is headed. He commands this to be an annual reorientation on the major questions in all of life: "Where have I been, and where am I going?"

So, He commanded us to live in booths—temporary dwellings—the symbolism, there, to remind us that we are on a pilgrimage. We are to consider ourselves to be strangers and foreigners; that though life is temporary, we are not wandering. Our pilgrimage has a definite direction. I hope yours does! That it has a definite direction to it, that it is headed somewhere. Our lives are purposeful and are headed in a certain direction, with all the zeal and commitment that we can give to it, because we firmly believe it. And, we have a pretty good vision of where it is going.

Now, this is because we have been shown the two great alternatives in life, and we are commanded to choose *life*.

God, speaking in His Word in the first person, decrees the fate of nations and empires. He prophesies specific events that are going to happen; things that are happening that He prophesied of a couple of thousand years ago through His prophets, and now we begin to see them occurring. They are happening right before our eyes.

He also reveals the ultimate destiny of mankind, the purpose that He calls in His own Word, “The mystery of God” in quite a number of places. That mystery goes far beyond what most have imagined even in their wildest dreams about the purpose of life, and yet once it has been revealed it is so obvious and so simple, and yet so powerful in its logic that one might wonder why he did not understand it before all along.

With this sermon I am continuing what I began last night in my opening message. This is another story that the Charlotte church got part of and I never finished. I was telling them that I actually picked up the idea from Mr. Sollars in a conversation he and I had, and I asked him to expand upon it a bit, and to write me what he felt was needful for the Feast of Tabernacles. I thought that what he said was pertinent as to what we are doing here, so I picked up on that.

Some of this material is going to be quite basic, but the reason that I am doing this is because I want to make sure that we are all headed in the same direction, that we understand the choices, and why such a commitment is needed, and why our lives must be devoted to preparing for the next stage of God’s purpose. That stage is just over the horizon. I hope that you will pick up these ideas, because these big things that we are going to be talking about are nothing more than a great number of little things. But, it is those little things that prepare us for our great goal.

Frequently, we tend to want little things to slide by as though they are unimportant. But, all those big things are made up of those little things that somehow grow great, and pile together. The next thing you know you either have something wonderful in our hands, because we have taken care of it; or we have a tremendous calamity that seeks to sink us, and smash us, and crush us because we did not take care of those little things while they were occurring and still small.

This begins the most fundamental and important of all spiritual elements—by knowing, and knowing that we know—that we are not the product of blind chance. Some of the most intelligent and highly educated of men believe in evolution. Evolution operates on blind chance. That is its fundamental principle. It is the totally fortuitous coming together of just the right elements at just the right time that not only sets off a chain of events that result in life, but also sets off all the processes that resulted in all the forms of life in a continuous stream of fortuitous events.

That theory says that life is accidental. That is its fundamental principle. It says that life is accidental; it is called natural selection. But, it is nonetheless that life is accidental rather than purposeful. You take that theory into the area of social circumstances and people, though they do not know it, are being taught that life itself and the events of life are accidental. There is no Great Hand guiding the outcome of this creation. That there is no Great Hand that started this at the beginning. But rather, you see, life is accidental, and all of the things that spawn from that are also accidental. This theory purposes that life, which is far more complicated than a watch or a computer, just happened accidentally!

You see, God's Word establishes a far different foundation. It is a foundation with a purpose.

Turn to real beginning, found in the Bible in John 1.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

What the Bible is revealing here is that there is a purposeful creation made by two Personalities who are both God. The Word was with God, and the Word was also God. Two personalities, and both are God. The life existing in their creation was something imparted to it from already existing life. Mankind, and all the other parts of creation that are alive, has life because these two Beings imparted life to them. They did it *purposefully*. It was *not* accidental. They set their mind and will to give life, and things began living.

It was not something they were constrained to do in the sense of obligation, but rather they were constrained to give life to their creation because they wanted to share what they are with what they were creating. That is the purpose behind everything that is made, as we will see as this unfolds. It is so simple in its logic, that what motivated this creation was the love of God who wanted to share what He is, and what He is able to do with what He makes. He had to give life because He *is* life. You cannot share these things without life. And so, He purposefully, then, imparted life to what He was making.

These verses do not explain the purpose of life, but John is laying the foundation for

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teaching that life, which imparted life, became flesh, and was the light of men. That is, it opened up to mankind this life that was lived; it opened up to mankind by mankind being able to, first of all, view it with their own eyes, and later on be able to read about it and understand what this life did. It gave life, and it gave form and shape to life. It gave direction to life. It enabled mankind to perceive what is around it; why things were there; where it was headed.

That is what life does in the midst of darkness. It opens up, and expands a person's vision because when he is in darkness, he cannot see at all. There can be no understanding. A person in darkness is afraid to move in any direction. They live in fear, because they are afraid that no matter which way they step, they are going to step into trouble; they are going to run into something and hurt themselves. In fact, they might step off a cliff and kill themselves.

But, it is only when light comes into a person's life that he begins to see what is around him. Then he begins to take his first faltering steps in the right direction on the right path.

Now, this light was imparted to mankind and mankind rejected it. It seems almost obscene, and yet we have all done this.

Turn to Genesis 1. We will again look at these simple principles that are the models for God's great purpose.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Here is the earliest indication we have from God's revelation of the purpose of creation. Can we say that it is really hidden? The only thing that really makes it hidden is the person's attitude toward what is written. If it is believed, it begins to become very simple. But, mankind is deceived, and will not believe it—these simple statements.

Now, what is the simple statement here? It is that mankind is created in the very image of the One doing the creating! It implies very strongly in context that we are created not after the animal kinds, but we are created after the God-kind. That is a conclusion that is very easily reached.

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Now we do have things in common with animals—a chemical/electrical existence; we must breathe air, and eat food. There is a commonality of design. But, the Bible makes very clear that we are not in the image of some animal; we are in the image of God. Therefore, it is implying that there is some other resemblance that we have with the God-kind that separates us from the animal kind. Though the information is not given here, the connection that we have with God is that we have a spirit within us that the animals do not have. That makes us more closely resemble God than animals, even though we share some likeness with the animals.

Another thing that is here, and is very important to God's purpose, is that He said, "Let them have dominion . . ." We find that not only is mankind created in the image of God, but that a major part of the purpose of the creation of mankind is to rule—to have dominion, or authority.

As you can see, God is laying down the foundation so that we understand the path that we are to follow, and it is going to have something to do with being God, and something to do with ruling other things.

Now, once we begin to have the other pieces the conclusion becomes very obvious.

Let us leave this for a moment. We will come back to this. Turn to Hebrews 2 where we will leap ahead in time, and we can begin to see a conclusion to what is given in the sketch in Genesis 1.

Hebrews 2:8-9 You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Why do you think that he mentioned Jesus? You see, we are not there yet where Jesus is, but he is pointing out that this is our destination. What Jesus is, we will become.

Here, then, is a stated reason of a major portion of the purpose for our creation. I think that we need to understand and admit it, and thank God for it, that we understand it in such simple logic that we have such an awesome destiny before us! And, it is so great that I know that we cannot grasp it. We can just see the barest outlines of it.

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It should excite us, and exhilarate us as we begin to understand more about living life on that level.

Turn back to Genesis 2 where we again have a simple and yet far-reaching statement of what mankind is to do with their life.

Genesis 2:15 Then the LOORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

The environment that God gave to mankind, which was only two people at that time, was equipped to serve God's purpose for mankind, and they had to begin exercising dominion and creativity in embellishing and preserving that environment from deterioration.

Apply that to the purpose of life.

As God begins to expand, the preparation for dominion, for being totally and completely of the God-kind, has something to do with tending and keeping. Tending means embellishing, cultivating, decoration. Keeping means guarding from deterioration. So whether it has to do with the building of character, or our ownership and maintenance of our material things, we are to dress and keep them. It begins to reach in to those small areas of life, things we might not consider to be very important, but it has to do with how we take care of the things God gives us for our life—whether our automobile, our home, or whatever else.

But, we are to dress and keep. This is a general direction that God wants us to go in, because following what God says here is going to prepare the person to rule in the Kingdom of God—not complicated to understand—simple things, yet these are profound statements because they are impacting on eternity. This labor serves the purpose of preparing mankind for its ultimate destiny.

Do not pass by these statements as applying only to Adam and Eve. They pertain to you and me too, as God establishes the models through which His purpose will be accomplished for all of mankind.

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

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Adam was able to discern that there could not be any real relationship with an animal. There was a difference there that could not be bridged, a gulf that could not be leaped over. He could never be one with something like that. He had to be one with something that is in the same image as himself.

I understand that the English word “woman” means, “man with a womb.” Of course, we understand that both man and woman are in the image of God, and that the characteristics in a woman came from God, just as the characteristics in a man came from God. God is the perfect blend of both man and woman. And you see, we are to become one with Him.

There is much, men, that you can learn from your wives. And there is much, women, that you can learn from your husbands. We are to become one, which does not mean just the joining of our bodies in sexual intercourse, but it means to become one so that one becomes almost like the other, and the one is softened by the softness of the other; and the other is hardened by the hardness of the other. The one has a certain kind of leadership qualities, while the other has other kinds of leadership qualities. They are somewhat similar, but they are beautifully different as well.

The family was God’s invention. It was His idea. He created it and He created it because this was going to be the environment in which most of mankind’s social relationships were going to occur.

Here, we have just gotten to the institution of greatest importance on earth!

God created the family long before He created the church. It is the foundational unit of life on earth. Of course, God got the idea from Himself, because He is a family, and the church is a family grown much greater than just a man and a woman, but it is God’s family.

So, the basic building block of society starts with the institution of marriage which God created and promoted as the means through which mankind would experience the majority of his social relationship experiences.

God purposely arranged these models at the very beginning of His revelation to mankind so that by reading these things perhaps, hopefully, people would start off on the right path to understanding what the purpose is. I wonder how many of us had gotten frustrated with Herbert Armstrong because he always went back to the Two Trees. A hundred times, it seems, he went back to the Two Trees. But that is where this world began.

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There is so much to be learned—simple things and yet profound in their action and reaction as far as the way life has been on this earth.

We are going to feed another thing into this mix. Actually, God began His family creation, He Himself points out, with Abraham. He chose him to be the father of the faithful. And, we are going to look forward all the way to Revelation 5:10 as we look at a goal, and then go back and fill in some of the details.

Revelation 5:10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Here we see a conclusion of God's purpose. What do we see? We see dominion! Just like in Genesis 1. Here is a destiny for mankind that matches beautifully with the greatness of a number of scriptures. Let us go to Psalm 8.

Psalm 8:1 O LORD, our Lord, how excellent [how glorious, how great] is Your name in all the earth, who have set Your glory above the heavens!

Psalm 8:4-9 What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels [Elohim = God], and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!

Did you catch it there, how Psalm 8 describes what mankind's dominion is? It is over the animals.

Now let us go back to the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 13.

Genesis 13:14-15 And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever."

Right there, it is pretty limited—"all the land that you can see." Even if he got up on the

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highest hill, all you are going to see might be 50 or 60 miles in any direction, and then it will be lost in the haze. But, if we take those words literally, and I want to do that at this time, his inheritance does not seem all that great; not really befitting someone who is going to become the father of the faithful.

But, take a look at Genesis 15:

Genesis 15:18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates . . ."

That is greatly expanded now, is it not? And that is what we are going to see, here. The promise to Abraham and to his seed is gradually expanded from what Abraham could see. We see it expanded from the River of Egypt (the Nile river), to the River Euphrates. Now we are talking about something that is several hundred miles square; a considerably larger piece of land.

Genesis 17:7-8 "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Genesis 26:3 Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands [plural]; . . .

Genesis 26:4-5 . . . and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

Leap into Romans 4:

Romans 4:13 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world . . .

By the time we get to the New Testament in the writings of Paul, Abraham is going to inherit the whole earth! And it is not just Abraham, but his descendants as well—the

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family of Abraham, the father of the faithful.

Let us review Hebrews 2 again:

Hebrews 2:8 “You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

The promise has now gone from everything that Abraham could see with his naked eyes to where Abraham is going to inherit the entire universe—not just the land of Canaan, not just the lands, not just the earth—he is going to inherit the entire universe. In fact, the Weymouth translation says, “For in this subjecting of the universe to man.”

Think of this please in relation to Genesis 1:26 where mankind was given dominion. In the Old Testament it kind of describes that dominion as being nothing more than over animals—sheep and so forth as we saw in Psalm 8. Now we find that his dominion has been extended to over the entire universe.

That, brethren, is too big for my mind! I can read the words, and I know that it is true, but I cannot grasp with my finite understanding and vision of things being given dominion over very much at all!

We are going to inherit these things; one of the things that Paul explains in the book of Galatians.

Galatians 3:14 That the blessing of Abraham [the promises] might come upon the Gentiles [not restricted only to Israel, but open to all mankind] in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

Christ is the real inheritor of the promises made to Abraham.

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male

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nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Here the legal technicalities are explained and we can understand why God is able to do what He is doing. We become an actual part, spiritually, of the body of Jesus Christ. If we think of it humanly, we are part of the liver, kidney, eye, hair, or mouth—that is the analogy the apostle Paul uses. Jesus Christ is the one who is going to inherit everything, and because we are part of the body, then we inherit not only the lands, not only the planets, not only the universe, but we also His authority along with Him. We will not have the same degree of authority, but because He is given authority, and because we are a part of Christ, we are also given dominion along with Him.

Colossians 1:15-16 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Since He is the heir, and He has already qualified for that, if the time comes and we are still part of the body of Jesus Christ at the time of the resurrection, we then will inherit everything that was prepared for Him.

Turn to the book of Luke. Here is Christ's testament to these men:

Luke 22:29-30 And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

We know specifically what those men are going to be doing in their positions of rulership—their positions of dominion. Now is God going to turn all the power and authority to exercise this dominion to just anybody who professes that he believes? Or, is He going to turn it over to those who He has found faithful? Is He going to turn it over to those that He knows can be trusted? Certainly, you know the answer to that.

This is why I feel that there has to be so much emphasis on preparation because this is what we are preparing for! We will not have positions of the caliber and power that these men have already been assigned, but the principle is there. Do you think that Jesus Christ did not spend three and a half years with them night and day preparing them for

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what they were going to do? And then all the while He was in heaven, and they were still on earth alive, He was using the powers of His office as High Priest to continue to refine their preparation for what they are going to be doing. He was very confident of His ability to finish what He started, was He not?

I hope that you will pick up on that. And you will be confident too, that what He has begun in your life, He is able also to finish; you will be prepared to do the job that He is preparing you and me for in the Kingdom of God if we would just give ourselves over to yielding to what He said we need to do.

It is very interesting that Solomon in Ecclesiastes 2 was very concerned about this principle. And so he expressed it:

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man [Rehoboam] who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

If Solomon was concerned about turning dominion over to his own son, do you think that God is going to be any less concerned about turning much greater power and dominion, and eternal life, over to those who are part of the purpose that He is working out? Do you think that God will be any less concerned when the stakes are so much greater?

Now, Solomon could do very little about the situation, because he faced death. He was thus powerless over anything that happened after he died. And that is why he said that this is also vanity. There was nothing that he could do about it once he was dead.

God is not without His resources, and He is doing what Solomon should have done. He is preparing His children to take care of the dominion that He is going to be giving to them. And so, He will prepare us to rule wisely for His Kingdom.

Turn to Luke 19, I want to pick up one thing here:

Luke 19:17 And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'

One of the things that this parable is doing is instructing us in the responsibilities of a

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disciple. Within the context of this parable, what are the responsibilities of a disciple? If you will read it carefully, you will find that the responsibility that is shown here is to make use of the gifts that God gives to His servants—the pounds, minas, or what-have-you.

How are those gifts embellished, or increased? It is through *work*. And what is God pleased with? Gain! Growth. It is good to note that there is a special commendation to one who is called faithful. A faithful person is one who is worthy of what was entrusted to them.

So, we see some interesting terms in relation to God's purpose—gifts, business, diligent working, gain, growing, and authority, over what we would call today as a political unit—a reward. Do you see that? What is the reward? It is authority. It is dominion.

What we see, then, and the overall conclusion is, that there is one who was indifferent to his calling—those who were commended were not indifferent, but they made the most of their opportunities.

Again, I refer you back to the beginning of the sermon, and God showing the church going to sleep when the time of the end occurs. Of course, it is not literally, but it is an attitude. It is an apathetic approach to things. It is losing one's way because one is distracted by what is going on around them, and failing to prioritize properly. It is nothing complicated. But God calls these people being asleep, and the result is that there was little or no Holy Spirit working in their lives. They did not have enough oil to fuel them in carrying out their responsibilities.

Look at this from a different perspective or angle. Turn to Revelation 2.

Revelation 2:26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

He shows here that ultimately we are going to be given dominion, and we are going to share that dominion with both the Father and the Son; that dominion is going to be over His creation—the universe. But, here in these two verses, the emphasis is on overcoming, rather than being busy, growing, or being faithful. All of those things are interlocked in the same process, and that process is our being prepared for the Kingdom of God.

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Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Now how could anything be more plain? How is this going to be done? The answer is given in a broad generality in a simple statement (God is great at making simple statements that are profound in their application.) What is eternal life? We tend to think of “eternal” in the sense of endlessness. But in the Bible it is more than that! It is not only endlessness, but it is a way of life. It is a quality of life. Now, think of these scriptures in light of that statement:

Matthew 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

Luke 4:4 But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.' "

Man shall not live—live? We are already alive! What is on Jesus' mind? It is not just life now, but it is life in the future—endless—a quality of life. If it was not a quality of life, then having eternal life would be no good, because we would take with us this same quality of life that we are living now, and that is no good at all. Look at what it has produced on earth!

Eternal life is a quality of life, and that quality of life flows out from the Word of God. But, it only flows out to those who believe what God says, and puts it into practice in their lives. There is nothing hard to understand here. It is those who are living by the Word of God before they die who are going to be given endless life, and given dominion because God knows that He can trust them. They are already doing it in their life now. They have been faithful in that which is least.

Living according to the simple instructions that are given in God's Word, given in broad generalities. It is not hard—do not steal, do not lie, do not commit adultery—those things provide a foundation. He says, “Love Me! I am your life.” Love your neighbor as yourself. There is nothing hard in understanding that. These are the things that make up that preparation. And, this is what God is looking for as to how well we are making use of living by His Word.

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Think back to Adam and Eve again. God said that in the day they ate thereof, they would surely die. That is the end of life. Why did they do what they did? They did not believe it. God's Word promotes, gives, life. I am talking quality of life—not the length. God by His power will give the length, but it is the Word that gives the quality. But, He will give His quality—yield His quality—only if it is believed and used. And, it will yield its fruit. What is going to be the greatest fruit of it? We will be prepared for whatever comes. Whatever way God wants to use us, we will be ready. And He will be very pleased to use us, because we are already living His Word; the witness that is made will be just what He wants, because He prepared us, and we cooperated in that preparation.

With this sermon I want to establish that we are all thinking of the Big Goal. What is this goal as it is fixed in your mind? It is very important. You should be able to see how Genesis 1:26 at the beginning of the Book connects with Revelation 20 at the end of the Book. Man is given dominion, and then ultimately given dominion again, only of a much vaster scope. There is really no comparison between the two! But, if we are not faithful in taking care of what we are given dominion over now, then it is going to be very difficult for God to give us the vaster gift of dominion that He wants to give us in the future.

So, given the illustrations that we have seen so far, do we not see a purposeful creation with mankind given dominion and told to prepare through dressing and keeping, through growing and overcoming, by using one's gifts, and being faithful to the Word of God, for the purpose of a far expanded dominion in the Kingdom of God? Even as God the Father reigns, so will His sons in His dynasty that He is creating. But, there is much to be accomplished in getting prepared for that. II Peter 3:18 tells us to grow; Matthew 5:48 tells us to become perfect (which does not mean without flaws, but fit for use); I Peter 1:15 tells us to become holy because He is holy; Ephesians 4:11-13, 15 tells us to grow to the stature of the measure of the fullness of Christ.

By now your head is probably spinning. You might even be feeling a bit of discouragement about how little has been accomplished in us, and so much remains to be done. But fear not, because I will now show you a series of scriptures that are very encouraging to me, that ensure me that God is able to bring about what He says that He is going to do.

Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

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I want you to understand that the verse does not say what it might appear to some to say. We are not working *for* salvation. In a major way, salvation is a done deal, because Christ already did that work. We are saved by grace through faith. This is an operation of God, not an operation of men. But, that does not mean that the process that God is working out, or the operation that God is working out is complete. Even though we are in a condition or a state of being saved, though God looks at things that are not as though they are, we still have to overcome sin in our lives so that it does not dominate us anymore, so that we are no longer a slave to it.

What we are doing, then, in working *out* our salvation, is not working *for* salvation, but we are putting our deliverance from Satan, sin, and death into practical operation. That is what Paul is talking about, here. Our salvation does not depend on the work that we do, but what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do. In working out this salvation, we find then:

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

It is He who gives us the will, and the power, if we would just use it. That is the catch in all this. You might recall the series of sermons that I gave on grace. Grace is not just the forgiveness of sins, but grace also includes that which we have just talked about, here—God gives us the will and the power to do what needs to be done. So, how can we ever brag to anybody that we have actually worked toward salvation, when God is the One working in us, giving us the will and the power to do?

We have to make the choice to do it. And then, it is His power that kicks in. But, He will only give enough will and power to ensure that our small part of it is very hard for us to do, because what is actually done truly becomes yours. It becomes a part of you. It becomes a part of your makeup. And it is not God, by fiat, creating character, but rather it is a cooperation between the God and the man, so that it ensures that the character and whatever other qualities become truly ours.

God has imparted a great deal more to the angels than He has imparted to us. Yet, our potential is far greater than theirs, because of the process we are having to go through. In a major way, it is much more difficult than anything He ever gave to angels. And the stakes are much greater too. No angel is going to have the type of position or dominion that is going to be given to us. He said to no angel, "This day have I made you My Son." He said to no angel, "I have left to you dominion over My creation." But God most certainly said that to us.

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So, every trial is going to seem like we are doing it alone. Let me give you a dumb illustration. If you are going to develop muscles, and you hire some expert at a gym to help you, and he says, "Here, pick up these barbells." And, every time you picked up the barbell, he did all the work. How much muscle will you build? You would never build a thing. So what God does, He picks up the barbell just enough so that you have to strain on your part to pick up the barbell too. Then, the muscles are yours, even though He was helping you the whole time. You would never have done what you did unless He helped pick up the barbell.

I hope this explains why it is so tough. Unless we are pushed to the limit (in one sense) of our ability, then the qualities are not going to be there. It is a creative-cooperative effort, and then it really becomes ours.

Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become [showing a process] blameless and harmless, children of God without fault . . . Become children of God without fault.

That is where we are headed. We are already saved. All He wants us to do is yield to the process, in which the product is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and self-control, as well as all those other qualities that are a part of Him. That is the salvation that is being worked out.

Philippians 2:15-17 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life [Matthew 4:4], so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

There is much more we could go into here, but we need to jump to Psalm 74 to catch a brief statement from the psalmist on the work of God.

Psalm 74:12 For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

That is His job. That is His work. The emphasis is on "His." God is a great Creator, working salvation, working deliverance, for His people, His sons, from Satan, sin, and

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from this world, in order that they might have within them—created through a cooperative effort—what He is. God is reproducing Himself. That is His work on the earth. It is this work that we need to throw our efforts into. If we get ourselves behind that project that He is directly involved in, then the witness will take care of itself, because He will use it.

In fact, I thought of this the other day. If we are preparing ourselves the way that God wants us to, you cannot stop the witness! It is impossible any more than you could hide a 1000-watt lightbulb in a dark room. It is impossible to stop. It will go forth in a thousand different ways, first from the lives of the people who are living it, and then collectively in some sort of work which God will have them do.

Let us finish in II Peter 1.

II Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord [look at this], as His divine power has given to us all things [everything] that pertains to [eternal] life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him [the Word of God] who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises [of Abraham], that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Perhaps the most important thing in these verses for the purpose of this sermon, is “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life, and godliness, that you have been made partakers of the divine nature.” Connect this to Genesis 1:26. Are we made after the God-kind, or not? So, what is our awesome potential and future? You know what it is. It is so simple. It is so logical.

From what is given in Scripture, we are born of God; we are to be God. And with that comes the inheritance of the promises, and a greatly expanded dominion that connects us with Genesis 1:26. In a nutshell, the whole thing is wrapped up there in a way, is it not? We are of the God-kind, and our potential is to be given dominion in His family over what He has created. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness." That is the goal. That is the priority in life from our Savior's own lips. The priority in life is to seek the Kingdom of God first, and all these other things will be added to you. This is what God wants you to commit to.