

2,25,21 Vision and Destiny

The Old Testament shows God's pattern of judging the leaders before judging the people (as shown in Ezek. 8). God starts with the leaders first, because their responsibility and accountability are higher than those they lead.

(James 3:1) "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, since you know that we who are teachers will incur a stricter judgment."

That's not a verse I have on my refrigerator. But it is one I take very seriously.

The other reason God follows this pattern is to allow the people under their leadership to wake up and move to a ministry that has more integrity. Some do; but some just leave the fallen leader's church and go to another church of the same kind and start over.

Over the last several years we've seen an acceleration of the Lord exposing and removing ministry leaders in our nation.

I'll share what is only a very small segment of a very large and growing list of fallen Christian leaders:

Robert Tilton (running an embezzlement scam.)

Gary Miller, Baptist pastor and graduate of Jerry Falwell's Liberty University (converted to Mormonism and now publicly advocates for the Latter-Day Saints)

Michael Hintz – Assembly of God Church in Iowa (sexual relations with a minor).

Carl Lentz - pastor of Hillsong N.Y. (sexual misconduct)

Ted Haggard – New Life Church Colorado Springs (caught in a gay sex scandal)

Bill Gothard - (molestation and assault of underage girls)

Bob Coy - 25,000-member church in Lauderdale (pornography & molestation of a four-year-old child)

Dave Reynolds - mega church in Arkansas (70 counts of possession of child pornography)

Doug Phillips - president of Visit Forum Ministries, close friend of Kirk Cameron and Tea Party advocate (sexual abuse of a 15-year-old girl)

Jimmy Swaggart (pornography and adultery)

Mark Driscoll – Mars Hill in Seattle (gay sex scandal)

Finally, Ravi Zacharias (several years of sexual misconduct)

I don't know about you, but I'm seeing a pattern here.

When we think of David - we realize that the Philistines, Goliath and lions and bears couldn't take him down, but lust did. The same was obviously true with Samson and many others.

This area of the flesh, especially for men, appears to be a great deal more powerful than we think.

The list is growing because the Lord is fulfilling His promise that judgement must begin at the household of God, before He moves against the nations in the Tribulation.

He's moving according to the pattern He's always had, holding the leaders as those most accountable, and exposing and removing them first.

Then He'll move to those who have supported and followed those men, and He will also judge any ministries associated with them (like Bethel's ties to Hillsong – it's only a matter of time).

Now, let get to our study.

The battle all of us are in is extremely difficult. We are constantly being pulled to things temporal away from things spiritual and eternal.

Sometimes it seems nearly impossible to have our mind fixed on the things of the Spirit, instead of the details of earthly life. But it's a fight we have to engage in.

I'm hoping to be able to help with that tonight.

I'll start with a verse in 2 Cor. 4:17-18;

"Our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal".

In one sense, the real challenge for us isn't our affliction (though it can obviously be overwhelming at times), it's adjusting everything in our lives to the eternal reality of the end result of our suffering.

In other words, how does what we are going through relate to the eternal?

For Abraham, it took a lifetime for him to move from earth to heaven. God promised him he would be the father of many nations. But first God wanted Abraham to come to understand that the ultimate fulfillment of this promise entailed a great deal more than the nations of earth. So, the Lord delayed long enough to wean Abraham of his limited vision of what God would eventually do.

In Heb. 11 we see that Abraham eventually came to see that God's promise was to take him far beyond even the millennial kingdom into the eternal councils of God.

(Heb. 11:8-10) "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out into a place which he would later receive as an inheritance. He went out not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the promised land, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs of the same promise, for he was looking for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Here's how the Amplified Bible translates vs. 10;

"For he was [waiting expectantly and confidently] looking forward to the city which has foundations, [an eternal, heavenly city] whose architect and builder is God."

This is an explanation of this truth from an online guide called, "BibleRef.com":

“This verse is key to understanding the perspective of early patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had promised Abraham his descendants would be a mighty nation, occupying a Promised Land (Genesis 15:5–7). The writer of Hebrews invoked Abraham as an example of true faith. That particular pledge had not been fulfilled in his lifetime, but he chose to trust God and obey accordingly. This, according to the writer of Hebrews, is because Abraham looked forward beyond his own life. The reference here to "the city that has foundations" might be an echo of the visions seen by prophets of the Old Testament (Ezekiel 40–48; Isaiah 60–66), and given more detail in the book of Revelation (Revelation 21:9–14). The city is the New Jerusalem, a feature of God's eventual conquest over all sin and death (Revelation 21:2–4). His faith explicitly led him to believe that God's ultimate purpose for him was not earthly, but heavenly.”

And this is from “Word Pictures in the New Testament” by Robertson,

“(The phrase ‘he looked for’ refers to Abraham’s steady and patient waiting in spite of disappointment’ . . . Abraham set his gaze on heaven as his real home, being a mere pilgrim on earth.”

Based on passages like Isa. 53:1-2 and Heb. 12:2 Jesus knew that it would be after His death, not before, that His glory would be fully revealed;

Here are those passages:

“He made himself as an offering for sin, He shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the good pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see (the outcome) of the anguish of his soul and be satisfied. By his knowledge My righteous servant shall justify the many, for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.”

And in Heb. 12,

“Let us look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What we see in Abraham and Christ is the most difficult faith of all, which is why Abraham is considered the 'father of faith' and Christ is its author and perfecter.

We've all found and hoped in what appear to be solid promises of God in the scriptures.

Then we prayed and waited – and waited.

Like Abraham, he may have waited decades without receiving any answer at all, let alone seeing the *fulfillment* of the promise.

So, what can we hope for? How can we have confidence in God's promises if the timing is so uncertain?

As we talked about in recent study, God is weaning us from personal expectations and explanations as to the how and time His promises are to be fulfilled.

Why would He do that?

Because His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. He knows what He's going to do and why it would be disastrous to us if He did any other way.

We have no clue what's really best for us.

His goal in our spiritual education is to force us (as He did with Abraham) to develop a patient and determined trust in a Person, not just in theology.

We search the scriptures because in them we think we will find abundant life, but they are they which testify of Christ and we won't come to Him that we may have true life.

How else could God do this? Delay forces us to wrestle intensely with what's happening and why it's happening.

Like Jacob wrestling with the Lord, we learn to hold on to Him as long as it takes, even it takes our whole lives.

The other thing God accomplishes in this is what happened to Abraham – our eyes shift from self to Christ and from earth to heaven.

That's the real goal – enabling us to lose our lives here and to long for what is not of this world. He's pulling the world out of us so we can genuinely see ourselves as pilgrims on earth and citizens of heaven.

Not just in theory or because we've read some verses about this, but because we finally understand through trial, delay and experience, that this is where true spiritual life is found.

This is when the Heb. 11:1 definition of faith is seen fleshed out in our lives.

In the Amplified, “Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. For by [faith—trust and holy fervor born of faith] the men of old had divine testimony borne to them and obtained a good report.”

In the rest of chapter 11 we see the listing of the faith heroes of the past, some who received the promises in time, others (like Abraham), who developed the kind of faith that enabled him to trust with promises unfilled until eternity.

(Heb. 11:35-40) “[Some] women received again their dead by a resurrection. [but] others died refusing to accept release [offered on the terms of denying their faith], so that they might be resurrected to a better life. Others had to suffer the trial of mocking and scourging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death; they were lured with tempting offers [to renounce their faith]; they were sawn asunder; they were slaughtered by the sword; [while they were alive] they had to go about wrapped in the skins of sheep and goats, utterly destitute, oppressed, cruelly treated- [Men] of whom the world was not worthy—roaming over the desolate places and the mountains, and [living] in caves and caverns and holes of the earth. And all of these, though they won divine approval by [means of] their faith, did not receive the fulfillment of what was promised, Because God had us in mind and had something better and greater in view. . .”

What the Lord is doing in our lives when delay is our ongoing experience is not because He doesn't like us or want to torment us, it's because He has “something better” in view.

Once Abraham and the others in Heb. 11 understood this, they didn't care about "here" anymore. God could do whatever He wanted, their resistance and impatience was gone.

Something better is better than something *not* better. And it's forever, not temporary.

Realizing that "momentary light affliction" led to an "eternal weight of glory" gave them both the faith and the vision to carry them through.

When I read what I'm going to read at the end of our study, you'll see why having this heavenly perspective and trust in the Lord, and seeing the glory of Christ and the destiny of the Church, is so incredibly vital to our spiritual survival.

I'm going to get more specific on some of the elements of that destiny for a few minutes, and for sake of time I can't read all the passages I'll be using, but I'm sure you'll recognize them in the wording I use.

We'll start with Matt. 6:19-20;

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in nor steal."

Mark 10:21;

"Then Jesus, looking upon him, loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, take up the cross and follow Me."

Luke 12:34;

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Anyone with limited understanding of the spiritual and eternal nature of passages like these, will only see them as saying that if we give money to the poor, the Lord will reward us in heaven.

As true as that is, it's only fraction of what Jesus had in mind when He made these offers.

So, what is the full spectrum of “treasures in heaven”? And remember, those “treasures” are not tied only to our financial generosity, they are connected to “where our heart is”.

I’ll divide them into three categories to help give us a better picture of their scope and variety, and I’m going to use this passage in 1 Pet. 1:7 to set the stage.

“. . . so that the proven character of your faith— more precious than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire— may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

When Christ returns for His bride, those whose faith has been refined through fire resulting in proven character (in other words; those whose conformity to Christ has continued to the end), will receive “praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

This is also what Paul means when he speaks of crowns and the high calling of God in Christ in his letters;

2 Tim. 4:7-8;

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but to all who have longed for His appearing.”

And Phil. 3:12-14;

“Not that I have already attained or have already been perfected, but I follow after it so that I may lay hold of that for which I was seized by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not count myself to have attained, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

The first category involves the treasures related to “honor” (as we saw in 1 Peter). They include;

- The crown of righteousness
- The crown of glory
- An imperishable wreath
- And a glorious entrance into the kingdom

The second category is the treasure of kingship; reigning with Christ.

Matt. 19:27-28

“Then Peter answered Him, “See, we have left everything and followed You. What then shall we have?” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Rev. 2:26-27

“To him who overcomes and keeps My works to the end, I will give authority over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron; like the vessels of a potter, they shall be broken in pieces; even as I myself have received authority from My Father.”

Rev. 3:21

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

And finally, the last category is the treasure of special intimacy with Christ (Rev. 2:17 & Luke 22:28-30)

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except he who receives it.”

“You are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I appoint to you a kingdom as My Father has appointed one to Me, so that you may eat and drink *at My table in My kingdom*, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

There have been many writers over the years who have written on the idea of rewards or “eternal treasures” connected to destiny, and passages like these are usually referenced:

(1 Cor. 15:40-42) “There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies. The glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. One star differs from another star in glory. So also, is the resurrection.”

(Matt. 5:19) “Whoever, therefore, breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do likewise shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

(Luke 19:15-19) “When he returned, having received the kingdom, he summoned these servants, to whom he had entrusted the money, that he might know what everyone gained by trading. The first came, saying, ‘Master, your pound has made ten pounds more. He said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in very little, take authority over ten cities.’ The second came, saying, ‘Master, your pound has made five pounds more.’ He said in like manner to him, ‘You, take authority over five cities.’”

(2 John 8) “Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”

Here are some of those men who have written on this principle:

(Augustine - commenting on 1 Cor. 15) “The saints, like the stars in the sky, obtain in the kingdom . . . diverse degrees of brightness.”

(Martin Luther) “And yet many differences of degrees of glory will prevail among us . . . each one in accord with the works which he has performed.”

(Calvin) “God . . . gives unequal degrees of light, so when He shall crown his (own), their degrees of glory in heaven will also be unequal.”

I want to move now to an expansion (beyond the doctrine of rewards) to what the Bible tells us about the progressive nature of our ‘spiritual education’.

I'm going to be reading from an essay by William Trotter which shows the stages of the unveiling of Christ throughout the history of humanity.

The segment of his writing that I want to read is kind of long (but not as long as the story I read a few weeks ago by James Clavell) and this one is much more important, bear with me – it definitely worth hearing;

“The calling of the church is not only distinguished from all that existed prior to itself; but also, from all that had been revealed to the prophets of Old Testament times, as to what was yet to be the manifested glory of Christ. . . . When we speak of the distinct calling and glory of the church, we mean that "the church" is called to a higher glory than will belong to Israel or to the nations. (Israel and the nations) will doubtless be happy under the reign of Christ; and that reign will bring fuller and higher blessing to Israel than to the other nations, who will be subordinate to Israel; but "the church" will be manifested as the bride — the heavenly bride — of Jesus when he reigns; not blest under his sway, but sharing his dominion and glory; and sharing it, moreover, in the character of his bride. . . . God's own glory in Christ is his great object; and it is as we bear this in mind, and view everything in connection with this, that we shall receive a correct understanding of God's blessed purposes and ways. Glory may be said to be the manifestation of excellency. The sun is the fountain of light and heat to this whole system, even when clouds interpose, and obscure its brightness; but when the clouds have passed away, and it shines forth in all its majesty and strength, then we see its glory. It is by the teaching of the (Holy Spirit), whose office it is to glorify Christ, by taking of his, and showing it unto us (it is the Spirit's purpose to show us the glory of Christ).”

Christ has a higher glory than any we may have comprehended. He is more than the Son of David (reigning from Jerusalem in His Kingdom), more than the Son of Abraham (the 'spiritual' seed of the woman encompassed both nations and the eternal offspring of Abraham), more than the Son of Man, (the sovereign of the works of God's hands, which position Adam forfeited). He is the Son of God; the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.

The very first mention of "the church" in Scripture is connected with the confession of this highest, divine, essential glory residing in the person of Christ, as Son of God.

Now here is a glory conferred on Christ which surpasses all that we have seen thus far. And it is to him, in this highest place of given glory, that the church is united. . . it is to him as in this, his highest place of given glory — the glory conferred on him not as the Son of David, not as the Son of Abraham, nor as the Son of Man, but as the Son of the Father — it is to him in the place of glory conferred upon him as the reward of His sacrifice, of his wondrous, infinite humility on the Cross, that the Church is united. She is associated with him thus as head, sovereign, ruler over *all* things.

The church is the body, the fulness of him whom God has thus raised from the dead, and set at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all powers, all things being put under his feet. The One who went down into the dust of death, having first stooped from the throne of the Eternal to become man, that he might go down into death, is the One whom God has raised from the dead to put all things under his feet; all things in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth. His body, the church, is thus associated with his glory in this headship over all (creation).

Here it is we see the surpassing glory of the church. There is nothing like it in heaven or in earth. It is by union with him that we receive this portion. And this explains what would not otherwise be understood.

Suppose a certain king, the monarch of wide domains, should pass by all the several ranks of nobility in his empire, and choose for his bride and the partner of his throne one who, by birth, and parentage, and condition, was immeasurably beneath them all. Though inferior to them, the moment she becomes, by his sovereign choice, the monarch's bride, she takes her place by his side, and all others rank beneath her.

Well, what are we, beloved brethren, in ourselves? Poor, wretched sinners, dead in trespasses and sins. Where has sovereign grace placed us? In living union, as his body, his bride, with the One whom God has set at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come!

How may we reckon, with the apostle, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. God grant us thus to know, and thus to estimate, the place of blessing and of joy in which he has set us, in union with Christ, at his right hand.”

The lyrics of “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” make a great deal more sense to me when I think about what this author has written;

“The things of earth will grow strangely dim the light of His glory and grace.”

If I weren't for men like William Trotter, who taught and wrote in the past, when studying the scriptures went much deeper than now, we would have no idea what this life is all about or what it's leading to.

They understood and experienced a Christ and a Christianity that is completely foreign to the one we are familiar with in our generation.

The only way we can win the fight is to keep our eyes fixed on Christ and our incredible destiny in Him.

We have to do we can to keep our heavenly calling in Christ always before us in thought and meditation.

Like we saw with Abraham at the beginning of our study, if we want to know the peace of God that passes understanding, we need to continually push away from earth until our hearts are fully established in heaven.