

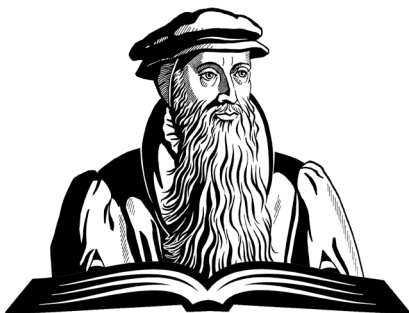
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7

ESCHATOLOGY— THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS 10 Lectures



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 Eschatology ~ Lecture 1 **Introduction**

We now come to our final section in our Systematic Theology lectures. It will be ten lectures on Eschatology. Eschatology is the doctrine of the Last Things. It looks unto the future, and on the basis of the teaching of Scripture, sets out what will happen in the future. Some people allow their imagination to lead them into fantastical speculation. But theology should always be sober and restrained, and based upon what God has clearly revealed. In trying to interpret prophecy, we must exercise a measure of caution, as it is notoriously difficult to interpret. When Christ came the first time, he took almost everyone by surprise. Although the Jews had the wonderful and detailed prophecies of the Old Testament, and they had a clear idea in their own minds what would happen, it didn't turn out as they expected. As one writer put it, when Christ came the first time, they all got it wrong. So it will be when Christ returns the second time. Even the best works of theology would be found to be somewhat inaccurate.

Eschatology has to be looked at in two ways. First, there is general eschatology, which considers the future of the church, and of the world, and of mankind in general. It describes the events which will take place before Christ returns, and then the end of the world, the judgment, and the eternal state. But there is also individual eschatology, which looks at the future from the perspective of the individual. This involves a person's death, what happens after death, the intermediate state, the resurrection, the final judgment, heaven and hell.

To begin with, we'll consider some current views. The teaching of evolution by Charles Darwin (1809–1882), and its general acceptance within the scientific community, in the media, and in the population in general, has to a large extent undermined faith in God. Naturalistic explanations of the origin of the universe and of man are treated as fact in Western society. The so-called “Big Bang” is seen as the basic answer to all man's questions of origin. But no one tells us what caused the Big Bang, and how nothing can somehow or other explode into something. People are happy not to ask too many questions. As a result, our world today is very secular. And because of this, it has been felt by many that we no longer need God. For them, there is no Creator, and there is no Judge. Man came from nowhere and is going nowhere. Because of this, there is little fear of God in society. Many people hold to a form of scientific materialism—man has no soul, and death is the end; life expires like a candle that burns out. Similarly they argue that we can know nothing about the future of the world—it's all up to chance. Perhaps the world will go on for millions of years, or maybe it will end in a nuclear holocaust, or alternatively, pollution will make life on earth impossible. There are many today who fear that the world will end with man-made climate change. However, the Bible teaches, and all Christians believe that God created the world. He is the God of providence who preserves it and looks after the world. He will one day bring the world to an

end by the return of the Son, and all will be judged, and receive their eternal reward according to their work.

Within the Christian church, the growth of higher criticism and liberal theology have undermined belief in the afterlife. Liberal theologians like Rudolf Bultmann say Jesus' resurrection was not material, but simply a rising in the faith of his disciples—he did not actually, physically rise from the dead. Similarly, when people die, they live on only in the memory of loved ones. Others, greatly influenced by the idea of the general fatherhood of God, and the fact that God is love—1 John 4, verse 8—argue that all must eventually end up in heaven, whatever their works, and whether they believe in Christ or not. Some talk of conditional immortality. They say that the soul of man is not immortal, and only true believers live forever. Generally speaking, within the Christian church today, there is little preaching on hell and the wrath to come. We however must not be influenced by the society around us, or even by the church around us, but rather, we must follow the teaching of Scripture.

I would like us then to look, first, at Old Testament teaching to consider the fall of man. When God created man, he made him in his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Man was created with an immortal soul that will never die. The purpose of his creation was so that man would glorify and enjoy God. He was to have fellowship with his Maker. God entered into a covenant of life with him. Man was placed on probation. He was given the Garden of Eden to live in, which was very beautiful, and contained all that he needed for a happy life. It was paradise, and God himself walked in the garden with him. It was similar to the description of heaven given in Revelation 22, and contained the tree of life in the middle of the garden. However, there was one great difference from the future paradise. There was in the Garden of Eden also the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God's first covenant with man, the covenant of works, stated, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"—Genesis 2, verse 17. Eternal life was promised to man, if he did not eat the forbidden fruit, but death was threatened if he did eat. Sadly, our first parents listened to the serpent, Satan, and broke God's covenant by eating the fruit. Immediately they felt naked and vulnerable before God. They had died spiritually. God came into the garden and pronounced his curse: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"—Genesis 3, verse 19. Physical death was coming to them. The aging process began, and it would be followed by the separation of body and soul. They were expelled out of the garden, and from the presence of God.

So the first sin of man led to death spiritual—separation from God; death natural—separation of body and soul; and without salvation, would lead to death eternal—eternal misery and separation from God in hell. Thankfully, at the same time, God revealed the gospel to our first parents. He told them about the provisions of the covenant of grace. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"—Genesis 3, verse 15. A child would be born to the woman, who would crush the serpent's head, and in the process, his heel would be crushed. This was further illustrated by God providing them with a covering for their nakedness. "Unto Adam also and to his wife, did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them"—verse 21. Animals were killed in order to be skinned to provide a covering for the nakedness of Adam and Eve before a holy God. These animals were types of Christ—symbols of him who would die to provide an atonement for sinners. The Hebrew word for "atonement" is "kaphar," or covering. Jesus died to provide us with a robe of righteousness to cover us in the place of the useless rags of our own self-righteousness. Christ is our hiding place.

Next, I would like us to think a little about the covenant made with Noah. After the fall, the world deteriorated morally and spiritually very quickly. The first man born, Cain, murdered his godly brother, Abel. Because of the immorality and violence of the ancient world, God destroyed it with a flood, that is, with drastic and catastrophic climate change. However, following the flood, God made a covenant with all mankind, which contained a promise: “I will not again curse the ground again any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease”—Genesis 8, verses 21–22. God promised that the seasons would continue, and that harvest would continue. God undertook to care for the world, and for man in it. And further, God gave a rainbow as a sign of his covenant, a token of the covenant: “This is a token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth”—Genesis 9, verses 12–13.

Looking into the future, the prophets of doom say that the world would become uninhabitable because of climate change. Modern man does not believe in God, and therefore finds no comfort in divine providence and the covenant made with Noah. But despite man’s unbelief, God’s covenant stands and insures that seedtime and harvest will not cease. God is active preserving the world, and man will not be able to destroy it.

Next, looking at the covenant with Abraham. God called Abraham out of idolatry in Ur of the Chaldees, and made his covenant of grace with him. He promised: “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”—Genesis 12, verse 3. God further promised Abraham, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness”—Genesis 15, verses 5–6. Abraham was made by God “the father of the faithful.” For centuries, the people of God would be limited to the physical children of Abraham and Jacob, but the promise is that eventually all the families of the earth will be blessed. Salvation would come through the great child of Abraham, who is the seed of the woman earlier revealed to Adam and Eve. “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”—Genesis 22, verse 18.

The church will grow to such an extent that it is not a mere remnant that will be saved—not just a little group. But the church will be as numerous as the stars. Further, it is not just some of the families of the earth that will be blessed, but so many will be blessed that it can legitimately be said that all the families of the earth will be blessed. Following the resurrection of Christ, and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, the gospel will be preached to all nations, and the church of God will eventually be “as the sand of the sea for multitude.” The promised future of the church is exceedingly bright, so Christians are to have an optimistic eschatology—a bright view of the future.

Next, thinking about Old Testament saints and the afterlife. Sometimes it’s asserted that the saints in Old Testament times had no clear understanding of life after death, and of heaven and hell. However, this can be shown to be clearly wrong. We are told, for example, of Enoch, that he walked with God: “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him”—Genesis 5:24. It is obvious that he went to heaven, where others go in their souls, as they await the resurrection. And Jude, in his epistle, tells us, “Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have

ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him”—Jude, verses 14–15. So we are told that he, that Enoch, in his own day, clearly declared the coming of the Lord, and that there would be a judgment day for the wicked. Hebrews tells us concerning Abraham that he had the expectation of going to heaven: “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”—Hebrews 11, verses 9–10. Further, it is written, “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city”—that’s verse 16. The land of promise was to Abraham a type or symbol of heaven. By living in tents, the patriarchs declared that this world was not their home. They were looking for an eternal dwelling place. Job displays his faith, when, in the midst of his horrendous trials, he exclaims: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another”—Job 19, verses 25–27. He shows here that he believes in a physical resurrection. His body will rot in the grave, but one day, he will be raised again, and he looks forward to seeing God, and he believes that he will see God “in my flesh”—with his physical eyes.

There are many passages in the Psalms which show that the Old Testament saints believed in the afterlife. Psalm 16 is quoted by Peter in his Pentecostal sermon with reference to Christ, but it obviously also has reference to all believers: “My flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell”—or in the grave—“neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”—Psalm 16, verses 9–11. In the following Psalm, Psalm 17, there is another reference to the resurrection. After death, the psalmist will awake to see God: “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness”—Psalm 17, verse 15. Psalm 23 is often sung at funerals: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever”—verse 6. Psalm 84 also clearly speaks of heaven: “They shall go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God”—Psalm 84, verse 7. The coming judgment day is also clearly portrayed in the Psalms: “The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous”—Psalm 1, verses 4–5. Sinners are warned of their need to make peace with the Son of God because of the coming day of his wrath: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him”—Psalm 2, verse 12. The psalmist, in Psalm 73, is troubled when he sees the prosperity of the wicked in this life. They even seem to have an easy death. But then he visits the temple and realizes their ultimate end: “Until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.” Well, they seemed to be having a great life, and seemed to have an easy death. Actually, they were cast into destruction—Psalm 73, verses 17–18.

Solomon describes death: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it”—Ecclesiastes 12, verse 7. The godly have a blessed future: “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”—Proverbs 4, verse 18. The wicked are warned of the coming judgment: “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment”—

Ecclesiastes 11, verse 9.

The prophets also speak with assurance of the afterlife. Isaiah describes heaven: “Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended”—Isaiah 60, verse 20. He also speaks of hell: “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh”—Isaiah 66, verse 24. Malachi writes of the future: “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch”—Malachi 4, verse 1. Surely, no one reading the Old Testament should doubt that it speaks of the resurrection and judgment of the righteous and the wicked, when we consider the prophesy of Daniel: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever”—Daniel 12, verses 2–3.

Now I’d like us to look at prophecies of the coming of Christ. Throughout the Old Testament, there is a promise of the coming Messiah, and a longing for him to come. We are first told of his coming in the curse on the serpent, which is the so-called proto-evangelium, or the first statement of the gospel: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”—Genesis 3:15. Isaiah foretells the coming one: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever”—Isaiah 9, verses 6–7. Yes, this mighty Savior who is coming, the greatest Prophet, Priest, and King. He is none other than the Lord. He will reign forever, but he would also suffer, as the suffering servant of the Lord. Indeed, this coming Priest will offer himself as a sacrifice: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”—Isaiah 53, verses 5–6. And then the prophet adds: “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand”—Isaiah 53, verse 10. He will suffer and die for the sins of his people. But with these very words, there is reference also to his triumphant resurrection: “He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” Though cut off, he shall prolong his days. We today are saved by looking back to Calvary, and putting our faith in the One who suffered there for our sins. In Old Testament times, they were also saved by faith, but their faith involved looking forward to the coming Messiah, and his sufferings in their room and in their place.

Now I would like to speak about the prophetic perspective. One problem that we have in many of the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah, is that the first and second coming of Christ seem to be combined. Think for example of Malachi’s prophecy: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to this temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall

come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness"—Malachi 3, verses 1–3. Now the messenger preparing the way here is obviously a reference to John the Baptist, as is confirmed by Matthew, chapter 3, verse 3, in describing the ministry of John. The messenger of the covenant though is the Lord, for who John prepared the way. He will come suddenly and unexpected by most. But then we read of him judging men and women, yet Jesus said, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world"—John 12, verse 47. So there is here obviously a reference also to his second coming. So the two comings of Christ are merged into one.

This is best explained when the future is considered from the perspective of the Old Testament prophet. It's rather like a traveler seeing a mountain range in the distance. All the mountains appear together, but when the traveler gets closer, he can see that there are actually two mountain ranges, one in front of the other, and perhaps many miles between the two. In this way, the two comings are seen together, though they are thousands of years apart. Joel prophesies concerning the coming of the day of the Lord: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call"—Joel chapter 2, verses 28–32. Peter assures us that this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost: "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." These are Peter's words in Acts 2, verses 16 to 17. The pouring out of God's Holy Spirit was an amazing and wonderful redemptive, historical event. But in the words of Joel, there is much that obviously refers to the second coming of Christ: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come." This must refer to the end of the world, the second coming of Christ, and the great judgment day. From the perspective of the Old Testament prophet, both comings of Christ merge into one.

It will be important in following lectures, as we consider the New Testament prophecies of the future, that we remember this principle of interpretation gleaned from the Old Testament prophecies concerning the viewing of the first and second comings of our Lord, as if they merged into one. This will be especially relevant when we consider, for example, Matthew 24, with Christ's prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the end of the world. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 2

The Doctrine of Death

We come today to our second lecture in eschatology, and this lecture is on the subject of death. Death is a huge reality that faces everyone of us. All around us, we see people dying—grandparents, parents, siblings, sometimes even our own children. Scripture says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”—Hebrews 9:27. Nothing seems more natural than death. Benjamin Franklin wrote in a letter to Jean-Baptiste Le Roy, in 1789, with regard to the American Constitution, “Our new constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency, but in this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes.” It may indeed be possible to avoid taxes, but there’s no escape from death. Every living creature around us is dying. Everyone of us, from the moment we are born, are terminally ill and slowly dying.

Let us look first then at the origin of death. Death is not natural, in the sense that it was not there from the beginning. When God first created the world, it was full of life, and there was no death anywhere. Adam was created in the image of God for fellowship with God. God entered into a covenant with him, promising him life on condition of perfect obedience, but threatening death on disobedience. If he obeyed God, he would live forever. But there was in the middle of the Garden of Eden the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God, in his covenant, said to Adam, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”—Genesis 2:16–17. Sadly, our first parents ate the forbidden fruit, and so, fell from the state in which they were created, into a state of sin and misery. So the world became a place where death reigned, instead of being, as it originally was, full of life.

Sometimes the point is made that Adam did not die on the day on which he ate the forbidden fruit—he actually lived for another nine hundred and thirty years. But to argue in this way fails to take account of what really happened. We must remember that there are three kinds of death spoken of in Scripture. First, there is natural death, which is the separation of body and soul. That began as a process of aging, when immediately Adam ate the forbidden fruit. Then there’s spiritual death. This is spiritual separation from God. This took place immediately. It was evidenced in that Adam felt naked and ashamed. When God came into the garden, he and Eve ran away to hide. The loving relationship in which he was created had changed. Man was now under God’s wrath and curse, and he felt it. Then thirdly, there is eternal death. This is what happens when an unconverted sinner dies, and is sent forever to hell. It is an existence eternally separated from God and from all his blessings. But it is not simply missing what is good, it is also being forever tormented by the just wrath of God.

So when Adam sinned, he and Eve died spiritually to God, and natural death began to work in their bodies. Thankfully, the sentence of eternal death was not carried out immediately. God, in his

great longsuffering, gave Adam time, and in his mercy, proclaimed the gospel to Adam, telling him of the coming Savior—Genesis 3:15. God allowed man to continue to live in this world, giving to him a day of grace, in which he could repent, and be converted, and so escape from eternal death. Because we were represented by Adam, our covenant head, in the garden, we sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. We too ate of the forbidden fruit, and so are sinners even before we are born. And so too, every one of us is actually born dead—we are born spiritually dead.

That brings us then to the idea of imputation. This truth is wonderfully presented by Paul, in Romans, particularly in chapter 5: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”—Romans 5, verse 19. God, when he created Adam, appointed him to be the covenant head of the human race. Because of this, when Adam disobeyed God, we too disobeyed God. When he sinned, we sinned. In the same way, the elect are in Christ. So Christ’s perfect obedience to his Father, keeping the law and suffering for sin, becomes ours, if we are in Christ, in the covenant of grace. “By the obedience of one, many were made righteous.” So Paul states, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life”—Romans 5, verses 14–18.

The first sin of Adam was ours, and brought about our condemnation. But wonderfully too, the last Adam, Christ, his obedience is ours, and makes us righteous. One sin condemned us, but Christ’s work contains pardon for those guilty of many offences. This salvation is available to all as a free gift. The only requirement is to receive it by faith. So faith is the condition of imputation in justification.

Later, in the same epistle, Paul writes, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”—Romans 6:23. Every sin is rebellion against God, and demands a response from God. It is a work for which payment is made. Unlike some human employers, God always pays wages in full. Our sinful works earn wages, which are either paid to us, or were paid to Christ in our place. The one condition of the covenant of grace is faith. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ benefit from Christ taking the wages for their sin upon himself. And so, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”—Romans 5, verse 1. Christ is freely offered to all to be their Savior, and all who receive him have their sins forgiven. When we believe in Jesus, all our sins—past, present, and future—are forgiven.

Now, thinking about the long lives of the Patriarchs. It’s interesting to notice at this stage, that the early inhabitants of the world lived much longer than we do today, despite the advances that we have today in modern medicine and surgery. Methuselah lived for nine hundred and sixty-nine years. How is this? Perhaps, as some have suggested, before the great deposits of coal and oil were formed, greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, covered the earth and protected the inhabitants from harmful, and cosmic, and ultraviolet rays. Perhaps too, the various harmful diseases and viruses which are common in our world today took time to develop. The flood certainly brought about catastrophic climate change. The flood itself came because of the wickedness and violence

of man, which had grown to intolerable levels. God decided, “My spirit will not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years”—Genesis 6, verse 3.

Now, the hundred and twenty years here no doubt refers, first and foremost, to the remaining time before the world would be destroyed by the flood, and therefore, the time that Noah was given in which to build the ark. But it would also seem to refer to the fact that now one hundred and twenty years is the maximum length of a man’s life. We are told that “GOD saw the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart”—Genesis 6, verses 5–6. God hates sin, and in his common grace, he limits it. He notes that “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”—Genesis 8:21. God’s longsuffering is great in allowing a life of threescore and ten years—Psalm 90, verse 10, or occasionally, up to a hundred and twenty years. But God has decided that that is long enough time for allowing man to repent.

We know, next, that all creation is affected. The sin of man didn’t just affect the human race. Man was the crown of creation, and therefore, his sin brought a curse upon the whole world. The animal kingdom was affected in many ways. God said to the serpent, “Because thou hast done this, thou are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life”—Genesis 3:14. The implication is that instead of walking, snakes would now have to slither. With regard to the plant world, it is said, “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field”

Genesis 3, verse 18. Weeds would now grow more readily than useful plants, and man would have to sweat to feed his family. Pain comes to the woman even in childbirth. What a wonderful blessing it is to have a child, but all good things in this fallen world have a negative side to them because of sin.

The whole of creation and life is under God’s curse and suffers pain. Death is universal, and that which leads to death too is universal. Sickness and suffering comes to every living creature. Paul picks up on this theme when he states, “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”—Romans 8:20–23. Wherever we look in the world there is pain and suffering. Nature is red in tooth and claw. In the animal kingdom, among birds, and fish there is fighting, killing, and eating one another. And even the inanimate creation groans. There are storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, typhoons, and hurricanes, all demonstrating a world writhing in pain, looking forward to the regeneration—the new birth, as it were, of the new heavens and the new earth, when the children of God will be revealed, and Christ will return to usher in his eternal kingdom.

Next, thinking of death. The words our Savior on the cross are very interesting and important: “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost”—Luke 23, verse 46. He voluntarily dismissed his spirit. He did not die in weakness, as you and I do. He cried with a loud voice to show his continuing strength. He had earlier said of his life, “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received

of my Father”—John 10, verse 18. Death had no claim upon him, because he was sinless. But he willingly offered himself as a sin offering for us, and he gave himself to death. He dismissed his spirit to the Father. When the time comes for us to die, we have no choice. People talk of fighting cancer, and imply that they can resist death, but death always wins. God has appointed the day of our birth, and the day of our death. When God calls us to give our account to him, none can say, “No.” As Solomon wrote, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it”—Ecclesiastes 12, verse 7).

However, there is all the difference in the world between the death of the Christian, and the death of the unbeliever. For the Christian, death is the doorway to glory. But for the unbeliever, death involves the sentence of condemnation. Death for the child of God is an exciting new beginning. In contrast, the psalmist says of the death of the wicked, “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors”—Psalm 73, verses 18–19. Stephen was the first Christian martyr following the resurrection of Christ. To prepare him for death, he was given a vision into heaven. He could see the Lord Jesus standing to receive him. He was so filled with the Spirit of God that his face shone like an angel. We are told that, “They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep”—Acts 7:59–60. What a glorious and victorious death that was.

Then, thinking about this “falling asleep”. It’s interesting to notice the difference that the New Testament makes between the death of a Christian, and the death of the unconverted. The Christian’s death is always called “falling asleep”. But that term is never used of the death of the wicked. Falling asleep is such a lovely picture—there’s nothing more peaceful. It is true that death is called the Christian’s last enemy—1 Corinthians 15:26. But it is the last enemy. And once death comes, there are no more enemies. The body is buried and rests in the grave till the resurrection, but the soul is transported to heaven. The Catechism states that the bodies of Christians are still united to Christ while they are dead in the grave. This is amazing. How could a rotting body be united to God? The reason for this is that when we become Christians, we are united to Christ. The Spirit of Christ enters into us and takes possession of us. Our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit, and God dwells in us. Another way of looking at this is that we are brought into Christ at conversion, and we become part of his body. Christ is the Head, and Christians are the members of the body, as it says in 1 Corinthians 12. Now human beings are not just souls. Remember how it’s put at creation: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”—Genesis 2, verse 7. Man is body and soul. So when we are converted, our body and soul, that is, our whole person is united to Christ. And that union is eternal and can never be broken. Paul states, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”—Romans 8:38–39. So our bodies are precious and are to be treated with great respect. Whatever happens to our bodies, they are united to Christ, and then at the resurrection, they are raised from the dead.

Now I’d like us to think a little about “soul sleep,” so called. One of the heresies that has been around for a long time, and is still here today, is the idea that when we die, the soul sleeps, or goes into some kind of suspended state. You see this in the early church—it refers to a small sect in Arabia that held to this view. Then there were some Anabaptists at the time of the Reformation, and later Irvinites who held to this view. The Jehovah Witnesses today teach this. Various argu-

ments are raised in its support. For example, the term “sleep” being used of death, but it should be remembered that it is the body which sleeps, and not the soul. It is sometimes argued that when individuals are raised from the dead, they say nothing about the state they had been in before being raised. But this could simply be explained by their memories being blanked by God. Alternatively, it could be that they were not allowed to say what they saw and experienced. Paul once had an amazing vision into heaven: “I knew such a man, (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter”—2 Corinthians 12, verses 3–4. The vision was so real to Paul that he was not sure whether he had been bodily transported into heaven, or whether it was simply in his mind. He adds that he heard words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. He was not allowed to say what he heard. That may be the case also with those raised from the dead.

Another argument is that the traditional view would require two judgment days—one when the individual dies, and another at the end of the world. We accept that in a way. Immediately when a person dies, they are sent either to heaven or to hell. If they have Christ, they go to heaven; if they don’t have Christ, they go to hell. However, this argument about the two judgment days fails to understand the purpose of the final judgment day. It’s not for settling the final state of the individual—that’s done at death, but for vindicating God’s justice and publically displaying the wickedness of the wicked, and the good works of the righteous. It is for openly acknowledging and acquitting the people of God.

There are various passages of Scripture that clearly teach the consciousness of the soul after death. For example, Jesus says to the thief on the cross—Luke 23:43, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” The converted thief was not heading for some dreamy grey place of sleep, but for the joys of paradise. Paul speaks of the tension that he felt, on the one hand desiring to die and be in a blessed heaven, and on the other hand wishing to remain so that he could benefit the church: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you”—Philippians 1, verses 21–24. It is far better to die because of the blessings of paradise which he will enjoy in his soul. At the end of his life, he looks forward to dying, because he knows the bliss that is awaiting him: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”—2 Timothy 4, verses 6–8.

But then a word about purgatory. Roman Catholic theology teaches that there are three states beyond death. The unbaptized wicked go straight to hell. The saints, a very small number of mankind who have earned God’s favor by their good works, go straight to heaven. Most Christians, they say, go to purgatory for further purification before they can enter heaven. There, they will be subjected to fire and torment because of their sins. Prayers and masses can be offered for the dead, so that their stay in purgatory will be shortened. The church on earth has power to grant indulgences, so that the time spent in purgatory is reduced. But the Scripture makes plain that when death comes, we enter our final state: “If a tree falleth toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where it falleth, there it shall be”—Ecclesiastes 11, verse 3. This doctrine has no support in the Scriptures, but very much the contrary. In fact, this doctrine denies the sufficiency of the work of Christ in making full atonement for all our sins. It is, therefore, an attack upon the work of Christ. The Lord Jesus bore our sins and was punished fully in our place: “There is therefore now

no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”—Romans 8, verse 1. Our sufferings anyway can never atone for our sins. “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed”—Isaiah 53, verse 5. Yes, in this life, we are chastised and corrected, and the fires of trial purify us. But the Christian is never punished. Christ endured all the punishment in our place. “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”—Romans 5, verse 1. In fact, Christ purged our sins before he ascended up to heaven: “When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat on the right hand of the majesty on high”—Hebrews 1, verse 3. There are only two places in the next world—the glories and joys of heaven, and the misery of hell.

Let’s think of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, because it’s very helpful on this subject, and it teaches us what happens at death—Luke 16, verses 19–31. We note that there is no purgatory here—only heaven and hell. An obvious contrast is drawn between the rich man and the beggar in their lives in this world. “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores”—Luke 16, verses 19 to 21. One appeared to have all the good things, and the other all the miseries. But the beggar’s name, Lazarus, is significant. Lazarus is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew name, Eleazar. It means, “his health is in God.” A further contrast is noticed in their death. Lazarus has angels around him as he dies, and they carry his soul into heaven. The rich man, presumably, has devils around his bedside, and they carry his soul to hell: “The rich man also died, and was buried, and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments”—verses 22–23. The nameless rich man was surrounded by every earthly comfort, and medical aid, and no doubt given a huge funeral. But meanwhile, he was in torments. The rich man asks that Lazarus be sent with a drop of water to comfort him in the flames. When that is refused, he asks that Lazarus be sent to warn his brothers, lest they end up in the same place. So obviously, he was conscious in his misery immediately after death, as was Lazarus of his joys in heaven. The rich man also was suffering while his brothers were enjoying the pleasures of this world. From this, it is plain that the soul does not sleep, but goes immediately either to heaven or to hell.

Let us now look at the intermediate state. A further fascinating passage of the Scripture which deals with the state of the believer between death and the resurrection is 2 Corinthians 5. Here, Paul states that the ultimate bliss follows the final resurrection: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”—2 Corinthians 5, verse 1. The earthly house which he refers to here is obviously the body in this world. One day soon, each one of us will experience this body being dissolved. That means the soul and the body will be parted. The lifeless body will be laid in the grave where it will decay. However, the dead will continue in conscious existence in their souls. Houses in this world are made with hands. But our eternal house, or our eternal body, will be made not with hands, but by God. The eternal house is the resurrection body which will be fit for eternal existence. Paul says, “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life”—verses 2–4. He states that we groan. We are longing for something that we do not have. We do not wish to be naked spirits. We do not wish to be unclothed, but clothed. We are fully redeemed only following the resurrection.

Death and the separation of body and soul are the result of sin. It comes as the curse upon us

as covenant breakers. But then, at the resurrection, all the effects of sin and the curse are removed. Body and soul are united again. Mortality is swallowed up of life. So Paul is asserting that the intermediate state, where the soul is naked without its body, is not ideal, yet he asserts that it is still better than the present state. For “whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord”—verse 6. Being present here below in our bodies means that we are absent from the Lord. Then he adds, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord”—verse 8. It is better to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. We have great comfort when our loved ones fall asleep in Jesus. We know that they are with Christ and happy in heaven. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 3

Events Leading to the Second Coming

Today we come to our third lecture in eschatology, and we will be dealing with the events preceding the second coming of Christ. Having begun consideration of individual eschatology, and dealt with death, and the intermediate state, I would like now to return to general eschatology, and look at the events which lead to the second coming of Christ. The return of Christ is the great hope and expectation of the church.

First, we will look at terms used for the second coming. There are three terms used in Scripture for the second coming of Christ. The first of these is “apocalypsis”, which means “revelation”. It has the idea of the removal of the veil, showing something which is otherwise hidden. It is the term used by Paul, when he says to the Corinthians, “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”—1 Corinthians 1, verses 7–8). It’s also used in 2 Thessalonians 1:6–7, “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” So it’s this revelation of Christ from heaven.

The second term that is used is “epiphaneia”, which means “appearance”, from which we get our term, epiphany. Paul uses this term when he admonishes Timothy: “That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ”—1 Timothy 6, verse 14—the “appearing” of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The third word that’s used is “parousia”, which means “coming”, and is used, for example, in Matthew 24:27, “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the “coming” of the Son of man be”—the “parousia” of the Son of man.

Now, thinking of the promised return. Our Lord Jesus told his disciples that he was going to have to leave them. This made them sad, but he assures them, “I will not leave you comfortless”—John 14, verse 18. He would not leave them like orphans. Indeed, he explained to them that it would be for their benefit: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you”—John 16, verse 7. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would be the abiding presence of Christ with the church, and he would apply the redemption purchased by Christ to them. He would regenerate them, indwell them, sanctify them, assure them, guide them, empower them, and glorify them. The Spirit would unite them to God. Jesus, as a man, was limited to being in one place at one time. But the Spirit, as God, is omnipresent. He’s able to be everywhere at once, and able to help every Christian, wherever they are, and to do it at the same time.

Jesus further encourages his disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”—John 14, verses 1–3. He assures them that he will return again. On an earlier occasion, he had warned them to be ready for his return: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come”—Matthew 24, verse 42. When tried before Caiaphas, the high priest, he asserted, “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven”—Matthew 26:64, and this caused the high priest to rend his garments and condemn Jesus as a blasphemer. But our Savior is the only man who never ever blasphemed. He spoke the truth. Following his ascension, while the disciples were still gazing up into the skies into which their Lord had disappeared, two angels stood by them in white clothes and said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”—Acts 1:11. Christ will return one day visibly and bodily, just as he had ascended and disappeared into the clouds.

When will Christ come again? Down through the centuries, people have tried to predict when Christ will return. The Jehovah Witnesses predicted that Christ’s second coming would be in 1878. When it didn’t happen, they predicted it would be in 1881. And when that didn’t happen, they said it would be in 1914, then 1918, then 1925, then 1975. They are obviously false prophets. Much publicity some years ago was given to Harold Camping, president of Family Radio, and a well-known Bible teacher, who predicted that Christ would return in September, 1994. He too was proved to be false.

Our Lord Jesus said that “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only”—Matthew 24:36. If it could be worked out from the Scriptures, Jesus would have done that. He knew many things that we do not. He is the Word of God, and the greatest Prophet there ever was, yet he did not know the date of the second coming. If course, as God—the second Person of the Trinity—he is omniscient, and he knows everything, but as a human being, he is limited. He knows only what God, through the Spirit, chooses to reveal to him. God had a purpose in keeping that day from him, and also from us.

Our duty is made plain: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh”—Matthew 25:13. We live in dangerous times. We are to be watching. There are many false prophets around. In Old Testament times, someone who prophesied of a future event, and it did not happen, was to be stoned to death—Deuteronomy 18:20–22. Jesus warned against those false prophets: “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”—Matthew 24:23–24. Yes, if it was possible, even the elect would be deceived. But of course, that is not possible: “But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things”—1 John 2:20. Peter assures believers of their preservation: “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”—1 Peter 1, verse 5.

But was Christ mistaken as to his return, thinking that it would take place in the lifetime of his disciples? Liberal theologians think that Christ was mistaken as to the time of his return. They say that he thought he would return in the lifetime of his disciples. In Matthew 24, we are told of many great things which were to happen, including his own return. And then Jesus says, “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall

pass away, but my words shall not pass away”—verses 34–35). On the surface, this seems to imply that his return would take place during the lifetime of some present. However, we totally reject liberal theology and its unbelief. If Jesus made mistakes, he is not the Son of God, and he cannot say this. If his prediction of certain events was wrong, we cannot trust him in anything he said. As real Christians, therefore, our starting point is the infallibility of Christ, and the infallibility of Scriptures.

But how then are we to understand Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24? Some evangelicals follow what is called a preterist understanding of this chapter. For them, all that is prophesied in Matthew 24, and also in Mark 13, has actually happened already. They see these events as fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation, which took place in AD 70. Jesus, they say, is using common apocalyptic language, which to us seem overly graphic to describe these dramatic events. Now it’s certainly possible to interpret the chapter in that way, however, to me, the chapter goes well beyond the events of AD 70, even allowing for the use of apocalyptic language here.

Others interpret it in a partly preterist way. They divide the chapter at the end of verse 35. What happened before verse 36, was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, but then verses 36 on describe the end of the world. However, the language in the part before verse 36 does seem to go beyond what happened in the destruction of Jerusalem, dramatic though that event was.

Surely, what we read in verses 30 and 31 describe the second coming of Christ: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”—Matthew 24, verses 30–31. Surely this can only refer to the end of the world and the final judgment.

Others argue that “this generation shall not pass” refers to the “evil and adulterous generation,” like the one that was then present. So an evil and adulterous generation in future times—there will always be such an evil generation. This type of generation will not pass till all is fulfilled. Or, alternatively, that it refers to the Jewish race, that the Jewish race will not pass until all these things be fulfilled. But surely, if this was the case, the word used would be “genos”—kind or race, rather than “genia”—which means “generation”. In all the other places in the New Testament where “genia”—“this generation”—is used, it refers to that actual generation. For example, “But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows”—Matthew 11:16. Another example would be: “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here”—Matthew 12:42. So Jesus is talking here about those who are alive and hearing him at that time. “This generation” refers to those who were present then and listening to him.

The best way to understand what Jesus is saying here is to go back to the original questions he was asked. The chapter begins with the disciples showing Jesus the temple. They are obviously proud of the beautiful buildings. Jesus responds to them: “See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down”—verse 2 of Matthew 24. That must have shocked the disciples. It left questions in their mind. Later, as he sat resting on the Mount of Olives looking towards Jerusalem, “the disciples came to him privately,” asking, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”—verse 3. So it is important to notice that Jesus is here asked two questions. First, he’s asked, When will the temple be destroyed? And then the second questions is,

What shall be the sign indicating the second coming and the end of the world? It is, in answering the first of these questions that he replies that this present generation will not pass till the temple is destroyed, and all these things connected with that be fulfilled. So the difficulty in interpreting Matthew 24 and 25, is that it is dealing with two future events separated by a considerable period of time. It's a bit like looking at mountain ranges in the distance. There are actually two mountain ranges separated by many miles, but they look just like one range until you come up to them. The same thing is to be found with the Old Testament prophets looking into the future. We see some things connected with the first coming of Christ, and some things connected with the second coming of Christ, but being in the future, we see these things as somewhat mingled together. At one time, the prophets are talking of the first coming of Christ, and then also of the second coming of Christ. So with Christ here, he is describing future events. At some points, he is clearly referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, and then he describes the end of the world. And then he comes back to the destruction of Jerusalem again.

So when Jesus says, "This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled, he is obviously answering the first of the questions of the disciples, and referring to the destruction of the temple, when not one stone was left standing upon another. When the early Christians saw the approach of the "abomination of desolation", that is, the Roman army with the worship of the emperor, they heeded the word of Christ. Christ had said, "Then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains"—verse 16, and they actually fled from the city of Jerusalem, and so they escaped the destruction of Jerusalem. So verses 15 to 20 clearly answer the first question with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem. However, in verses 14, or verse 27, or verses 30 to 31, he is obviously talking about his own coming and the end of the world. In verses 34 and 35, he returns to the temple being destroyed, and is clearly speaking of the events of AD 70. Again, in verses 36 onward, he is talking about the end of the world.

Now there are some other passages which seem to imply an imminent return of Christ. Jesus once said, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come"—Matthew 10:23. Surely this teaches that Christ will return in the lifetime of the disciples. But this coming refers to his coming in power. And he came in power at his own resurrection, and at Pentecost by his Spirit. The disciples, in the time remaining till his resurrection and Pentecost, will not have been able to evangelize every town in Israel. Jesus had said, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"—Matthew 10:5–6. Following Pentecost, the Lord, in the great commission, instructs that the gospel is to be preached to all nations, not just the Jews—Matthew 28, verses 18–20. Similarly, we have the words of Christ in the Gospel of Mark: "And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." This passage is immediately followed by an account of the transfiguration, in which the veil is lifted slightly, and the kingship and glory of Christ is partly revealed. But the kingdom of Christ came with power in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and in the pouring out of his Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

So then we have the question, should we expect that Christ might return any day? Jesus said that his return would be as it was in the days of Noah. Then, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and did not realize what happened until the flood came and carried them all away. And Jesus warns, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come"—Matthew 24:42. It was said it was the same in the

days of Lot: “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all”—Luke 17:28–29. We are warned, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Don’t look back; keep your eyes on the coming of Christ. The Lord Jesus will come as a thief in the night. “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”—Matthew 24:44.

Christ, of course, can come in two ways. He can come in death, carrying us away to our long home. Or he can come in the second coming, ushering in the final judgment. Paul speaks of Christ’s return: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief”—1 Thessalonians 5, verses 1–4. They should not be sleeping, but watching for the return of the Lord. The day of the Lord, that is, the day of his return in judgment, will come suddenly and take many by surprise. Peter also warned: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God”—2 Peter 3, verses 10–12. Again, the emphasis is upon the suddenness of Christ’s return.

But we are also to be looking forward to it, and praying for Christ to come soon. The last words in the book of Revelation are also relevant and speak of an imminent return: “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”—Revelation 22, verses 20–21. Christ himself assures us that he will return. Two thousand years have passed. But to God, a thousand years are as one day, so his coming will be soon.

But then, are there events which still need to occur before Christ can return? Some Christians think each day they rise that this might be the day of Christ’s return. Should we be like that—living constantly looking for Jesus to appear? We certainly should be watching and praying each day, and be ready for Christ’s coming, and be ready to die. Even if Christ does not return today, this very day could be our last in this world. We are to be ready for heaven. It does seem, however, that this attitude can become wrongly extreme. The Thessalonian church was troubled with this, in that, “the day of Christ is at hand”—2 Thessalonians 2, verse 2. As a result of this teaching, some of them had given up their ordinary employments, and were just waiting for the end of the world. But Paul is not pleased. He writes, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition”—2 Thessalonians 2:3. Later, in the same epistle, he warns those who had given up their jobs: “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread”—2 Thessalonians 3:10–12. So it is plain from this that certain things had to happen before Christ could return. Here, we are told about the falling away which has to take place first, and the revelation of the man of sin, or the antichrist. In Romans 11, we are told of something else which must happen before Christ returns—the conversion of the Jews to Christ. Now, of course, these events could take place quickly, but from this, it appears that

Christ could not return today.

Now I'd like us to think about the signs of the end. Jesus was asked the question, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"—Matthew 24, verse 3. A list of signs are given. There will be many deceivers, false prophets, and false Christs. There will be wars and rumors of wars. There will be famines, and pestilences or plagues, and earthquakes in many places. Christians will be tortured, and killed, and hated by all nations, for the sake of their relationship to Christ. Many will be offended, turning away from the faith, and even betraying fellow Christians. Many will apostatize. The gospel will be preached to all nations. There shall be great tribulation—Matthew 24, verses 4–28.

We have made reference already to the antichrist, or the man of sin who is yet to be revealed. John also tells us about antichrist, and of many antichrists: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us"—1 John 2:18–19. Antichrists were already there in the days of John, but there is the great antichrist ahead.

In Daniel, chapter 7, we are told about the little horn who displaces three other kings, also symbolized by horns: "And of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came"—Daniel 7, verses 20–22. And then later, "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end"—verses 25–26. The ten horns seem to refer to the Roman emperors, but three of them are displaced by the little horn, which would seem to refer to the Popes of Rome, who take over from the emperors, and continue the power of Rome, and who speak great things of themselves, and make huge claims, but who persecuted many of the saints of the Lord. They did this especially around the time of the Reformation, when there were thousands of martyrs to Roman Catholicism.

Thinking then about the man of sin. Paul tells us about this man of sin: "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie"—2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verses 4–11.

Different interpretations have been given of this man of sin, or antichrist. Some see him as a persecuting Roman emperor, like Nero. Others think that it refers to some future great individual. The common view amongst the Reformers and the Puritans is that it is the Pope of Rome. For example, *the Westminster Confession of Faith* states, "There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that

man of sin, and the son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God”—that’s chapter 25, section 6, of *the Confession*. The spirit of antichrist was already at work in Paul’s day, and so there is a continuity of the Popes with the past, i.e., with the emperors of Rome in persecuting the true saints. The antichrist is obviously someone within the church, because he sits in the temple of God. He claims a position like God. Popes claim to be the kings of the church, wearing a crown, or triple tiara, taking the position of Christ as head of the church on earth. And Rome also has been notorious for its fake miracles and lying wonders. It deals in deception, and those who do not love the truth of God’s word are led astray by its false teachings.

In the book of Revelation, we read of the great whore, the Mother of Harlots—Revelation 17, who is also a city, Babylon the Great. She is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. She is seated on a beast with seven heads. And this is interpreted for us as the seven mountains on which the woman sits. Now Babylon was no longer a city in the first century, but Rome classically is the city built upon the seven hills—or seven mountains. Peter is generally understood to be writing from Rome, when he sent his greetings from the local church where he was: “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you: and so doth Marcus my son”—1 Peter 5, verse 13. This woman is further interpreted for us as, “That great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth”—Revelation 17, verse 18. And she makes war with the Lamb—verse 14. But she is destroyed: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird”—Revelation 18, verse 2. She stands in stark contrast to the bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”—Revelation 21, verse 2. Traditionally, the Reformers and Puritans saw Babylon the Harlot as representing the Roman Catholic Church. Many modern Reformed theologians see it, rather, as representing the world and its enmity to Christ and the church. It is worth noticing, however, that the Harlot is distinguished from the kings of the earth who have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth who were made rich through selling their merchandise to her. So therefore, the kings and the merchants are distinct from the Harlot. The Roman Catholic Church martyred many millions of godly men and women, and yet claims to be the bride of Christ. The Roman Empire with its emperors persecuted the apostles and believers in the first centuries, but changed into the Roman Catholic Church, with its Popes, which persecuted the Reformers in later days.

These signs of the end have largely been fulfilled. The gospel is now preached to all nations. Christians are to be found in all countries. There have been famines, and earthquakes, and wars. There is pestilence—this coronavirus troubling the whole world, and the governments and scientists find great difficulty in coping with the coronavirus. There has been a great falling away in the church, and the love of many has grown cold. The present Pope, Francis—a Jesuit—seems more clever and cunning than any of the past. He is even trying to get the Muslims to come in under his banner in the one world church, in opposition to the true, blood-bought children of God.

There is still, however, one sign that needs to be fulfilled before Christ returns, and that is the conversion of the Jews. And more Jews have been converted today than ever before. We will consider this in a future lecture. Following the conversion of the Jews, there will be a falling away, and a brief spiritually dark period: “Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God

out of heaven, and devoured them”—Revelation 20, verses 7–9. There will be intense persecution, and the very existence of the church on earth will be threatened. This will be the so-called battle of Armageddon. Then at the point when the darkness is greatest, the Lord will return. He will judge all mankind, and will cast the devil and his angels into the lake of fire, and all those who side with him. He will receive his children into heaven, to enjoy Him forevermore. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 4

Interpreting the Book of Revelation

We now come to our fourth lecture in eschatology. Our topic for today is Interpreting the Book of Revelation. The book of Revelation has proved mysterious to many. It's language and imagery are graphic. It's quite different from other books of the New Testament, but there are similar parts of the Old Testament where we find this apocalyptic language, for example, in sections of Ezekiel and of Daniel. Some theologians and commentators avoid Revelation because of the special difficulty of interpreting its imagery. Calvin, for example, provided no commentary on it. However, it's in the Scriptures, it's there for a purpose, and indeed, when properly approached, it can provide us with great encouragement. It's there for our benefit, and particularly to encourage us in difficulties, and in times of persecution.

There are essentially four different approaches to interpreting this book. First of all, there's the preterist view. This approaches the book of Revelation by regarding it as describing past events. Everything in the book happened already, the preterists argue, in the first century AD. The destruction of Jerusalem features prominently in this interpretation. They say that the writer was concerned about the evil of the Roman Empire and its persecution of the church. He uses graphic imagery to express his conviction that God will intervene to deliver his church. This type of interpretation is favored by liberal theologians. There is, of course, some truth in this approach. A number of the passages are descriptive of events which took place in the first century. Also, it is right to ground the book firmly in the first century, as it was a book written then for the church as it existed at that time, as well as for the church down through the centuries. It's right to see the book of Revelation as providing encouragement for persecuted first-century believers. However, confining the book to the events which had taken place in the first century fails to take account of the book's own testimony concerning itself at the very beginning: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which much shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John"—Revelation 1, verse 1. Here we are clearly told that the book deals with future events, "things which must come to pass."

Then secondly, there's the historicist view. This approach sees the book of Revelation as setting out a panoramic view of history from the first century till the second coming. Such commentators see it as a continual story from John's day till the end of the world. This approach has been a common one in the Christian church down through the centuries, and it would be followed by some of the Reformers. But there is much conflict as to how the various episodes in church history are to be related to the book. Different interpreters follow this approach, but come up with very different interpretations. The lack of consensus does not help to convince that this approach is right. Also,

it tends to treat European history and ignores the rest of the world. However, again, there is some truth in it, insofar as it lays stress upon the book as prophesying the future.

Then thirdly, there's the futurist view. The futurist view sees all of the book of Revelation, from chapter four onward, as referring to the end of the world. The book is not concerned with happenings in John's day, or since, but all of it has to do with future events, the events surrounding the return of Christ. This view is helpful in emphasizing the second coming and the return of Christ, which are of central importance in the book, but it's wrong in detaching the book completely from the present and the past.

Fourthly, the idealist or poetic view. This view emphasizes that the book is concerned with encouraging persecuted Christians in the first century and since then. Graphic language is used to describe, in imaginative ways, the triumph of God. The symbolic language is not to be taken as what will actually happen, but simply a poetic way of describing the ultimate victory of Christ and his kingdom. While there is certainly truth in this overall idea and purpose, the problem, again, with this view is that the first verse of the book claims that it is actually prophecy.

So then, how are we to interpret the book? The best approach is as follows. None of the views that have been given are entirely satisfactory, though there is a grain of truth in them all. So how are we to interpret the book? I believe that William Hendriksen, in his brief commentary, entitled, *More than Conquerors*, helps us greatly in interpreting Revelation. I do not follow all his interpretations, but his general outline is very helpful. He begins by seeing the book as written to encourage first-century Christians who were suffering severe persecution, and of course, to encourage the rest of us down through the centuries. So in this, he partially follows the preterists, seeing some of the events as actually having taken place, even before John wrote. He follows the idealists in seeing it as a book to encourage, not simply to reveal secrets. He appreciates the historicists with their emphasis on history foretold, and the futurists with their stress on the second coming. However, essentially he sees the book as consisting of seven sections which are parallel, and each of them spans the New Testament dispensation from the first to the second coming of Christ. Numbers are very important in the book, and seven is the perfect number, and the number of the church. Much of the language is, of course, symbolical, and characteristically apocalyptic and should not be taken literally.

We shall now look briefly at the book and notice its various sections. So the first section one, chapters 1 to 3. This section describes Christ in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, which represent the church. Christ is presented in his exalted glory as the King and Head of the church, and actively involved in ruling and defending it. The seven churches in Asia were indeed real churches in first-century Asia Minor. However, they also are representative of the churches in all ages till the return of Christ. Seven, as we noticed, is the complete and perfect number, and the number of the church. These letters are highly relevant for the churches of today, both rebuking the evil in the church, and encouraging the churches to be faithful, and stand for Christ in dark days, and in days of persecution.

The second section, chapters 4 to 7, this section describes the book with the seven seals. First, we are given a vision into heaven, and there we see the throne that rules heaven and earth. What an encouragement this is, when there are powerful, persecuting forces in the world. Look up! God reigns, let the earth be glad—Psalm 97, verse 1. Then a scroll is pictured in the hand of God on the throne. And this scroll obviously contains the purposes of God with regard to the world, and especially his church. Initially, none was found worthy to open the book. But then the Lion of the tribe of Judah steps forward and takes the book, and opens the seal. This Lion is none other than

Christ, the Lamb of God that was slain to take away the sins of the world. He appears “as it had been slain”—Revelation 5, verse 6.

So this takes us right back to Calvary. The opening of the seals is the unfolding of God’s purposes, or the rule of Christ in the New Testament dispensation. He shall rule till his enemies be made his footstool. This section ends with the church of God saved, and at rest and peace in heaven: “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before he throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”—obviously heaven—Revelation 7, verses 14–17.

The third section is chapters 8 to 11. This section describes the seven trumpets of judgment. The previous section describes the tribulations through which God’s people pass in this world. So the seals of trial and persecution render necessary the trumpets of judgment. In answer to the prayers of the suffering church, God sends down through the centuries his plagues on land, sea, and air. So again, this section parallels the previous one. The prayers of the godly offered with incense from the altar of Christ’s sufferings are heard and their persecutors are punished. Christ is ruling, restraining, and conquering his enemies. Again, the end point is the final judgment: “And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth”—Revelation 11, verse 18.

Section four is chapters 12 to 14. The first half of Revelation that we have just looked at describes the struggle of the church on earth, how it is persecuted, and how it is avenged, protected, and ultimately victorious. The second half of Revelation, to which we now turn, describes the deeper spiritual background. Christ and his church are persecuted by Satan and his allies. This section, chapters 12 to 14, describe how the woman and the man child are persecuted by the dragon and his helpers. The birth of the man-child obviously refers to Christ being born, so this takes us back to the beginning of the New Testament age. The child Christ ascends to heaven, but the dragon makes war with the woman and her seed, which is, of course, the church. Christ and his church are persecuted by the dragon, representing Satan.

With regard to the beasts of chapter 13, I would deviate somewhat from Hendriksen, and follow the traditional Reformed interpretation, which sees the beasts representing antichrist. The first arises out of the sea, which is representative of the nations—a fearful, persecuting beast, and having the characteristics of a leopard, a bear, and a lion. This would seem to represent the Roman Empire which terribly persecuted the early church. It should also be seen as the persecuting governments of today. The beast from the earth is represented as looking like a lamb with two horns, and speaking like a lion. This appears to represent the papacy. The Pope claimed to be in the place of Christ, who is the Lamb of God. He pretends to be gentle, but speaks like a dragon, arrogantly claiming to be the mouthpiece of God, and infallible as he speaks *ex cathedra*. He too and his false church persecute the true children of God, who suffered greatly at the hand of this false lamb and its inquisition. This is the same individual as the little horn in Daniel 7, verse 8. The number of the true church is seven, but the number of the false church—the church of the antichrist, is six, six, six—Revelation 13, verse 18. It is short of seven, and it’s defective, and what is vital is missing.

“Babylon is fallen”—Revelation 14:8. Babylon is the church of the antichrist, and the opposite of the New Jerusalem, which is the church of Christ. Again, this section ends with the judgment of the wicked and the followers of the beasts and dragon at the end of world history: “And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs”—Revelation 14:19–20. As the followers of Christ, we are on the winning side.

Now section five, chapters 15 and 16. This section describes the seven vials or bowls of wrath poured out upon the followers of the dragon and the beasts. It parallels the opening of the seven seals of trial, and the sounding of the seven trumpets of judgment. This section describes what will happen to those who persist in rejecting the gospel. On them will be poured the seven last plagues of God’s wrath. First, we are told of the sea of glass, and those who are victorious over the dragon and the beasts. The picture here is drawn from the Israelites at the Red Sea, having had victory over the Egyptians, singing in triumph. So now, “they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?”—Revelation 15, verses 3–4. The vials of wrath were poured upon the earth, the sea, the rivers, the sun, the seat of the beast, etc. All who reject the light of the gospel will perish. The nations gather against the true church to destroy it, in the great battle of Armageddon, but Christ returns to deliver his people in the final judgment. We are told that “the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found”—Revelation 16:19–20. Again, the end to note is God’s wrath upon the apostates. The plague which comes upon them, the plagues are exceeding great, much worse than those that came on the land of Egypt.

Now section six, chapters 17 to 19. This section describes the fall of the great Harlot, Babylon, and the beasts. Chapter 17 describes the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones, “having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication”—verse 4. This Babylon the Great, drunk with the blood of the saints, rides on a beast full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads are interpreted as the seven hills on which the city is built—obviously, again, a reference to Rome. The ten horns are ten kings who reign with the beast. They make war with the Lamb. We think of how the emperors of Rome set themselves against the Christian church in the early centuries. Later on, the Roman Popes took their place, and persecuted the true church of God. Some interpret this great city, as Hendriksen does, as the world and its opposition to the church. The world is pleasure-mad, luxurious, arrogant, and the center of antichristian culture and persecution. I believe, however, with the majority of the Reformers and Reformed theologians before the twentieth century, that it is better to see Babylon as the false church—the Roman Catholic antichrist, the pretend bride of Christ that deceives many with their sacraments, claims of infallibility, pretends to be able to forgive sin, and asserts that there is salvation to no one but those who are in its membership, and persecutes the true saints of God. If Babylon is equated with the world, it is difficult to distinguish it as a city from those who mourn over its fall, that is, the kings of the earth and the merchants. If Babylon the Great is equated with the Roman Catholic Church, it is easy to see how its fall causes sorrow to those who obtain their wealth and power through trading with it. The Roman Catholic Church is an institution of vast wealth and influence, right up to the present day. The Whore stands in stark contrast to the bride of Christ—the true church. And if the New Jerusalem, the bride of

Christ, is the church, why should the Harlot, or false bride, not be the false church?

But then, Christ appears: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God”—Revelation 19, verses 11–15. War against the Lamb and his followers is doomed to failure. The beast and the false prophet, and those who receive the mark of the beast, that is, the followers of the beast, are cast into the lake of fire. Christ and his church will always win.

Next, section seven, that’s chapters 20 to 22. This last section of the book deals with the locking up of Satan in the bottomless pit, and later with the judgment of Satan, and of all mankind, and the final state—the appearance of the New Jerusalem and the new heavens and the new earth. Now, I would like us to look particularly at Revelation 20. This chapter is important, because we find here reference to the thousand years, or the millennium, around which the various eschatological views have arisen, and so we must devote more time to it. Essentially, there are three views, though obviously, there are many variations of these three views.

First, there is premillennialism, and this is the understanding that Christ will one day return to reign on this earth as King in Jerusalem, and his reign will last for a thousand years. This view was common in the early church, and it had the name, Chiliasm. It was revived by the Anabaptists at the time of the Reformation. It became popular among some in the nineteenth century, due to the teaching of Edward Irving, and was the view of Robert Murray M’Cheyne, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, and also was the view of C. H. Spurgeon. Dispensationalism, which is also premillennial, became the view of the Christian Brethren, and the Fundamentalists of America, and would predominate in evangelical circles in the twentieth century, due to its being popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible, and by radio and TV evangelists. We will look at this view in more detail in a later lecture.

The second view is postmillennialism. This is the view that there will be a prolonged period of blessing, of great spiritual prosperity for the church of Christ, which would be equated with the thousand years, though it is not to be taken literally as one thousand years. After the blessed millennium, there will be a falling away spiritually, a time of fierce persecution, and then Christ will return. So the return of Christ is after the millennium—postmillennialism. This is the view that was common among the English and Dutch Puritans, and also the early Scottish and American theologians. It would be the position held by Jonathan Edwards, the Hodges, the Alexanders, B. B. Warfield, and many other classical Reformed theologians.

Then the third position. We’ve looked at premillennialism—Christ coming before the millennium; postmillennialism—Christ coming after the millennium; and now amillennialism. This is the view that there is no millennium, or rather, that the whole New Testament age is to be seen as the millennium. This would be the commonest view held today by Reformed theologians. This view was promoted by Dutch and Dutch American theologians of the twentieth century, such as Herman Bavinck, Louis Berkof, and William Hendriksen. It tends to be pessimistic in outlook, expecting things to get worse and worse till Christ returns, which could be very soon. It would seem to have been influenced somewhat by the drastic effects of the higher criticism movement in the

nineteenth century, evolutionary thinking, and rationalism, which came into the churches and destroyed the mainline churches, and it was further exacerbated by the two devastating world wars that took place in the twentieth century.

Revelation 20 begins with an angel binding the dragon, the old serpent, obviously a reference to the one who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. To make it completely clear, we are told that the one bound was the devil and Satan. The angel has a key and a great chain, and binds Satan for a thousand years. Further, we are told that the angel cast Satan into the bottomless pit and shut him up—obviously locked him in with a key, and set a seal upon him in the pit, so that he could deceive the nations no more until the thousand years be fulfilled, and then he must be loosed for a little time. Some take the language in Revelation literally, but we must be very cautious against doing that since much of the language is obviously symbolical. You cannot, for example, tie a spirit with a chain. It requires a body for somebody to be chained, and the devil has no body. So the chain, the lock, and the seal are pictures, and also the thousand years should simply be viewed as a long period of time.

So the question arises as to when was or will this binding of Satan be done? Hendriksen takes us back to the Gospels, and sees the binding of Satan as that which Christ did on the cross. He refers to passages such as where Christ says, “No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house”—Mark 3, verse 27. He sees Christ as the One who bound Satan, and this gospel can then be preached and Satan’s kingdom plundered. Before the death of Christ, the whole world lay in heathen darkness, apart from the tiny land of Israel. But following Christ’s ascension comes the day of Pentecost, and then the missionary expansion of the church rapidly spreading across the Roman world. So this position is certainly a sane and sensible position, and much can be said in its favor. There are, however, a few problems. This passage states, Revelation 20, states that the devil is locked up and sealed in a bottomless pit, and therefore unable to move around the world and deceive the nations. Yet Peter states plainly, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” Surely Satan cannot be both locked up and walking around devouring people. We are told that he is unable to deceive the nations for a thousand years. Yet Christ warns that if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived—Matthew 24:24. And Paul warns us of the need for the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one—the dragon—Ephesians 6:16. We look around the world today and we see billions of men and women deceived by the devil, following Islam—the false prophet Mohammed, following Buddhism, Hinduism, atheism, and Roman Catholicism. Surely evolution is a great deception of Satan, and yet how widely it is accepted today. Amillennial theologians will argue that the situation is much better than it was in the Old Testament times. And that, of course, is true, though more than half the world was just in as much darkness for 1,500 years after the death of Christ as it was before.

A further problem is that the passage specifically states that before the end, Satan will be loosed for a little season. If Satan was bound by the great historical redemptive act of Christ on Calvary, how can he be loosed without undoing the victory of Christ on the cross? Surely Christ’s death on the cross is a once-for-all crushing of the serpent’s head. For those who follow the amillennial interpretation, they explain it as things getting really bad before the end. But surely, it has been really bad many times in the past, with Muslim persecution, and Roman Catholic persecution, with the darkness of the dark ages. How could it possibly get worse?

Well, let’s look then at postmillennialism. In the postmillennial understanding, this millennium is in the future, and coincides with the promises of an age of great blessing foretold in the Old

Testament. For example, in Psalm 72, where it is said of Christ, “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him”—Psalm 72, verses 8–11. Now this has never happened up to the present. This future millennia would also involve the conversion of the Jews described in Romans 11, and will result in “life from the dead”—Romans 11:15—for the Gentile world.

Let us look further then at how postmillennialists understand Revelation 20. Verses 1 and 2 tell us of a future day when heaven will intervene in the history of the world, and Satan will be greatly restrained and restricted. His ability to deceive will be largely reduced. False religions will largely disappear. Liberal theology will have little appeal, and evolution will be seen as nonsense. Christ was enthroned in heaven at his ascension and reigns—reigns at present. But now his enemies will clearly be seen to be his footstool. The gospel will be preached with power, and most people will be saved. During this period of triumph, the martyrs who died for the cause of Christ will reign with him, in the sense that they will be seen universally to have been on the right and winning side. There will be a spiritual resurrection, a life from the dead for the church, which for so long has been struggling against atheism, unbelief, and heresy. The second death of hell will have no power over the true Christians. The Lord’s people will be priests and kings in the spiritual sense. But then, at the end of this period, Satan will be loosed, deceive the nations again, and stir up intense persecution against the true people of God. When it seems that the church is about to be exterminated, Christ will return and destroy his enemies. The great white throne will be set up and the final judgment will take place.

This was the classical Protestant understanding of the passage, however, we must not be too dogmatic. Prophecy is notoriously difficult to interpret. God often takes us by surprise. One thing we must understand is that there will never be shortcuts to salvation. The way to be saved is always the same. Jesus said, “Ye must be born again.” Paul responded to the question of the Philippian jailor, “What must I do to be saved?” with a clear answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”—Acts 16:30–31. Every individual, whether Jew or Gentile, must repent and believe the gospel to be saved. The book of Revelation reveals, as William Hendriksen rightly states, that Christians are more than conquerors. Chapters 20 to 22 declare complete victory for Christ and his church, and the destruction of all his enemies, including the dragon, that old serpent the devil and Satan. It tells us of the blessed future state of Christians, and the miserable lake of fire awaiting unbelievers. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 5

The Jews

Today we come to our fifth lecture on Eschatology, and our subject will be the Jews. There is one matter which is very important for us to consider when thinking of the events which must occur before Christ can return. Many Christians believe that the Jews, as a people, will one day be converted to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. There is one special New Testament passage which is very important to understand when thinking of the future, and that is, Romans, chapter 11. We believe that God there makes great promises concerning the Jews, which are yet to be fulfilled. Paul's epistle to the Romans is the most theological of all his epistles, and sets out clearly many of the great truths of the Christian faith, commonly regarded as a summary of the Christian faith. In Romans, chapter 1, Paul makes a great statement, which, in a way, sets out the theme of the epistle, and declares what it's all about. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith"—that's Romans 1, verses 16 and 17.

It's worth noticing in passing, how we are told here that the gospel is to the Jew first. Many Christians today believe in what is called "replacement theology." This is the idea that all the promises of the Old Testament, with regard to the Jews, belong now to the church. For them, the church has replaced Israel, and is the new Israel. They believe that with the crucifixion of Christ, the Jews lost the special position they once had. While this is largely the case, it's not the full story, and we must be careful, lest we oversimplify the teaching of Scripture. We see here, in Romans 1, that in writing to the church at Rome, Paul asserts that the Jews still have a special priority. The gospel is to the Jew first. Wherever Paul went on his missionary journeys, he went to the Jews, and to the synagogue with the good news, and only when they rejected the message did he turned to the Gentiles.

For example, when he was brought as a prisoner to Rome, he explained the gospel first to the Jews, and only when the majority of them rejected the gospel, did he turn to the Gentiles, warning the Jews, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it"—Acts 28, verse 28. Paul proceeds, in the rest of Romans 1 to show the sin and the need of the Gentiles who did not have the Old Testament. Although they didn't have the written law, yet, they were lawbreakers. In chapter 2, he demonstrates the sinfulness of the Jews who did have the written law. In chapter 3, he concludes that both Jews and Gentiles are sinners—are guilty before God, and in need of salvation. In the second part of chapter 3, he presents Jesus Christ as the needed Savior, the One who atones for our sins—our propitiation. In chapters 4 and 5, he declares that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. In chapters 6 to 8, he deals with

sanctification and assurance. And then, in Romans 9 to 11, he explains election, and God's sovereignty in salvation. And this is the section in which we must especially focus.

In Romans 9, Paul writes of his great love to his fellow Jews, and his sadness at the way they have generally rejected Christ. He could wish himself lost, if only the Jews were saved. He speaks of their privileges: "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises"—Romans 9, verse 4—all the good things the Jews had. But not all Jews are lost. Election is very important. God chose Isaac, but not Ishmael. Rebecca had twins, but God's election was shown, in that even before they were born, or had done good or evil, "It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger"—Romans 9:12. "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"—verse 13. The potter has power over the clay to make whatever type of vessel he wishes. God could show mercy to all, or show mercy to none, but he chose to save some: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"—verse 18. Though Israel were largely a rebellious people, God always had his elect among them: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved"—verse 27. In chapter 10, Paul continues to speak of his love for his fellow Jews: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge"—Romans 10, verses 1–2. Israel here cannot possibly mean the church. He is referring to his kinsmen, the Jews, who were zealous in seeking to save themselves, but it was by their own works. He explains the way of salvation is by faith alone. He notes that Israel are still rejecting the gospel, just as Isaiah had prophesied they would: "But to Israel, he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people"—Romans 10:21.

Turning now to Romans 11, Paul begins chapter 11 by asking if God had completely rejected the Jews, and notes that that cannot be the case, because he himself is a Jew and is saved. He asserts that God did not cast away his people whom he foreknew and fore-loved. Israel had and have a special place in God's election. He is aware that there is a godly remnant, just as was the case in the days of Elijah: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace"—Romans 11, verse 5. Being a mere Israelite will save no one. It never did, and never will. But election saves "and the rest were blinded"—verse 7. The Apostle then asks a critical question in verse 11: Have the Jews stumbled so that they will totally fall away? He answers in a strong negative, that proceeds to make an important point: "Rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them"—the Jews—"to jealousy"—verse 11. In a strange way, the Jews' rejection of the gospel meant that God turned from them to the despised Gentiles in order to provoke the Jews to jealousy for their souls' salvation. Then a most important statement is made: "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?"—verse 12. If, as was the case, the falling away of the Jews was a blessing to the Gentiles, how much more will their fulness and restoration be a blessing? Right through this section of the epistle, Paul is obviously using the term "Israel" and the term "Jews" of the ethnic Israel, and not of the church. Paul proceeds to make a great promise: "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"—verse 15. Paul's argument runs as follows. If the rejecting of Jesus by the Jews brought salvation to many Gentiles, surely then, the salvation of the Jews will bring massive revival—life from the dead—to the Gentile church.

The Apostle next describes the church as being like an olive tree. The root grew in Old Testament times. The root is holy, and so the branches, originally pagan Gentiles, are also holy. The

Gentiles are like a wild olive tree, and branches were cut from it, and grafted into the good olive tree. Indeed, Jewish branches were broken off the good olive tree so as to allow this to happen. The Gentiles, however, are warned against pride: “But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee”—that’s verses 18 to 21. The Gentiles have nothing to be proud of, and they are warned that they too can be broken off and rejected. Paul encourages the unbelieving Jews that they should not despair, but repent and believe, and they will be saved: “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?”—verses 23 and 24.

The next verse, that is, verse 25, is very important in the argument of the Apostle: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”—verse 25. A mystery in the New Testament is a secret hid from past generations, and now revealed. In Old Testament times, salvation was largely restricted to the Jews. But now, something wonderful has happened. Blindness in part has happened to the Jews. God, in his sovereignty and justice, has blinded them, so that they cannot see that Jesus is the Messiah. Thankfully, it has only been in part, and there have been Jews like Peter and Paul who have been saved. And indeed, down through the centuries, since the time of the apostles, there has always been a few Jewish converts. The Jews as a whole rejected Jesus, and God has instead filled his church with Gentiles. However, there is here that very important word—“until”. The blindness which has come upon the Jews is only “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” So the Apostle envisages a day coming when this will change, when the fulness of the Gentiles will have been saved, a large number of them being converted, then something new will happen: “And so all Israel shall be saved”—verse 26.

At this point, many commentators suddenly and inexplicably take “Israel” to mean “the church” composed of Gentiles and a few Jews. When in all the other references in Romans 9 through 11, “Israel” clearly refers to ethnic Israel. Surely this is bad exegesis, though it’s very common. Unless there is an overwhelming reason for it, Israel should be taken mean what it means in the rest of the chapter. Here there is a clear prophecy that so many of the Jews will be saved that it can be said that all Israel shall be saved, just as it was previously said that they, Israel, had been cast away—verse 1. Although a remnant were saved, so now it is said that all Israel shall be saved. That does not, of course, imply that every individual Israelite will be saved, but rather, Israel as a whole.

It is also important to emphasize that they can only be saved by exercising faith in Christ. They will not continue in unbelief. There’s only one way of salvation, for Jew and Gentile. As the Scripture says, “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob”—verse 26. This Deliverer is the Lord Jesus, who by his Spirit, turns sinners from their ungodliness, granting repentance now to Jews, indeed, the majority of Jews, as well as to Gentiles, and so all of Israel shall be saved.

The same thing is continued in the next verse, verse 27. And the “them” referred to in that verse, as well as the “enemies” of the following verse can obviously refer to none but the ethnic Jews: “For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes”—verses 27 and 28. Why give “Israel” in verse 26 a different meaning from the “them”

and “enemies” in verses 27 and 28. God made his covenant with Abraham, and is a covenant of grace—all of grace, and therefore, an eternal covenant. Similarly, God’s covenant with Moses and with Israel was a covenant of grace. Yes, the Jews were cast away for a time, but then God returns to them. They still have a place in God’s plan of election. The Jews became enemies in order that the gospel might reach the Gentiles. But God’s election remains. Israel is beloved for the Father’s sake—verse 28. God still has a purpose of mercy for the Jews. Verse 29 is wonderfully reassuring: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” God bestowed his gifts and calling upon the Israelites, and they are still special in his eyes. He hardened them for a time because of their unbelief, but they are still special to him. Here, he is promising the restoration of Israel to a central place in his church.

A future day. Paul explains that the Gentiles in Rome were enemies in the past because of their unbelief in God, but now they have obtained mercy through the Jews’ unbelief: “Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy”—verse 31. We are to have a special concern and love in our hearts for the Jews, and particularly to seek their salvation. Thinking of these things, and looking forward to the day when his kinsmen according to the flesh will be grafted in again to the olive tree of the church, Paul breaks out into a doxology: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his Counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”—verses 33–36. God is working out his plan of salvation, and God still has a great purpose for the Jews. Although the Apostle grieves that for the time being the Jews are unbelievers, it fills his heart with joy to think of that future day when the Jews, as a people, will be converted and accept the true Messiah.

Now, not all Reformed theologians would agree with this interpretation of Romans 11. For example, Stuart Olyott, in his commentary on Romans, entitled, *The Gospel as it Really Is*, argues that there are no special promises for the Jews. In his classic *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof writes of Christ, “He does not hint at any prospective restoration and conversion of the Jewish people” (page 699 in Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*). He does not hint, Christ, at any restoration or conversion of the Jews—is that really true? Actually, there are several passages where Jesus indicates that there will be a blessed day ahead for the Jews. For example, our Lord does say, “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”—Luke 21:24. The “until” clearly implies that there is a time coming when the Jews will no longer be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles. It implies that there is a time of blessing coming for Jerusalem and the Jews. Another important statement of Jesus also implies the conversion of the Jews. Jesus mourns over the Jews and weeps over the judgment that is coming upon them for rejecting him as the Messiah. But he also speaks of a coming day when their attitude will be totally different: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”—Matthew 23:37–39. Here, Jesus is looking forward to the conversion of the Jews. He says, he will not return again, they shall not see him again, until the majority of the Jews will repent and believe, and rejoice in his coming, saying “blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

While it is true that at the present, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto

life, and few there be that find it,”—Matthew 7:14, many of Jesus’ parables speak of better days ahead. In the parable of the leaven, Christ speaks of the kingdom spreading till the whole world is leavened, or Christianized. The parable of the mustard seed implies that the church will not remain a tiny minority, but will become a great tree, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in its branches. Jesus compares the Jews to a fig tree planted in a vineyard. The owner comes to the gardener, saying, “Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”—Luke 13, verse 7. For three years, Christ labored among the Jews, but there was little fruit. “And he answering said unto him Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about I, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down”—verses 8 and 9. Christ, the Mediator, intercedes for the Jewish fig tree, the barren fig tree. It was spared another year, yes, it was spared until AD 70, and many Jews meantime were saved. But the general rejection of the Messiah continued until eventually the fig tree was cut down, AD 70. However, the stump remained in the ground, like Nebuchadnezzar’s stump in Daniel 4. Jesus makes reference again to the fig tree, when talking about the events immediately preceding his second coming: “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors”—Matthew 24, verses 32–33. When God’s fig tree begins to sprout again and puts forth leaves, the return of Christ is approaching. Again, the implication here is that the Jews will yet be saved and become a fruitful fig tree in the vineyard of the Lord.

Looking then at other passages of Scripture, there are many Old Testament passages which can be seen to teach the restoration of Israel. One of the clearest examples is Ezekiel 37—the vision of the valley of dead bones. Here, Ezekiel the prophet is given an amazing vision and insight. He is taken by the Spirit of the Lord into a valley which was full of bones. He had to walk among them to get convicted of the dire reality of the situation. There were many bones, and they were very dry. It was a horrible sight—all these skeletons around. Then he’s asked a question: “Can these bones live?” Surely the answer is obvious. Common sense says, No. The prophet, however, wisely replies, “O Lord GOD, thou knowest”—Ezekiel 37, verse 3. God says to him, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts”—verse 11. Israel is in captivity in Babylon, Jerusalem is destroyed, the temple is burnt with fire, and the promised land of Canaan is empty. Israel is cut off, and our hope for the future is lost.

Ezekiel then is given a strange command: “Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD”—verses 4–6. The prophet is to proclaim God’s word to the heaps of bones. As Ezekiel was prophesying, we are told, “There was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them”—verses 7–8. What a remarkable, indeed, hair-raising sight that must have been. All around the valley, bones were moving, finding other bones, sinews and flesh were growing, and skin covering the bones on the bodies. So that now there was a valley full of dead bodies. So many, and yet still so dead.

The prophet is now commanded, “Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live”—verse 9. Remember, the word for “breath,” and “wind,” and “spirit,” in

Hebrew, is the same—“ruah”. Now Ezekiel tells us, “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath”—or spirit—“came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army”—verse 10. God’s Spirit came down upon them, causing a wonderful resurrection. What a sight! Thousands of soldiers ready for battle. The vision is then explained to the prophet: “Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD”—verses 12–14. No, at that specific point in time, the situation seemed hopeless, yet God was going to do great things. Israel was to be spiritually resurrected, returning to their own land, and become a mighty army for God. After seventy years, the Jews did return. The temple was built on a more modest scale, and eventually the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. But it was only a few Jews that returned. Their enemies said of them, “What do these feeble Jews?”—Nehemiah 4, verse 2. God helped them, but there was no sign of the mighty army. They struggled on, dominated by the great powers around them, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans.

So how will this passage be fulfilled? There has, since the days of Ezekiel, been no mighty resurrection of the Jews, or a great army standing up for God. Replacement theologians spiritualize it and say it refers to the Christian church, and yet there is a specific reference here to the Jewish people—their captivity, and their land. God says, “Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land”—verse 21. Surely no one can consider the history of the Jews over the last two thousand years, and fail to see the special hand and purpose of God in that people. Pilate was reluctant to execute Jesus, knowing that he was innocent, and that the charges brought against him by the Jews were out of envy, and that the Jews wanted to get rid of him: “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on all our children”—Matthew 27, verse 25. In AD 70, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and massacred millions of Jews, and sold the rest of them as slaves. For the next two thousand years, they were hounded from country to country. They were horribly persecuted by the Roman Catholic Inquisition, subjected to pogroms by the Russians, six million of them were killed by the Nazis, and everywhere, to this day, subjected to anti-Semitism. Yet, they have survived, and they’ve kept their identity.

Furthermore, contrary to all historical precedent, they have been settled again in their own land, and already eight million of them—more than half the Jews in the world—have returned to the land of Israel. There, they have been surrounded by numerous and powerful hostile armies—Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, etc., which, from the day of their independence in 1948, have repeatedly attacked them. Yet they’ve survived. And not only have the Jews survived, but now they have become the superpower of the Middle East. How could this happen, apart from the hand of God upon them for good? But we are still awaiting the conversion of the Jews to Christ as a people. In 1948, there were some thirty Christian Jews in Israel. Today it’s reckoned that there are some thirty thousand, and this number is increasing exponentially. We are looking for God to do even more. We await the Lord, as it were, raising them up from the dead, and converting them into a mighty army for him, a great force in evangelizing the world.

But is this idea of the conversion of the Jews an odd view held by just a few strange people? Actually, it was by far the commonest view of orthodox theologians from the time of the Reformation till the twentieth century. *The Westminster Standards* are the great standards of the Presbyte-

rian Church across the world. They were produced by the Westminster Assembly of Divines in the seventeenth century. The answer to question #191 of *The Larger Catechism* is very informative. In dealing with the Lord's Prayer, the question is asked, "What do we pray for in the second petition?" The answer is given as follows: "In the second petition, (which is, *Thy kingdom come*), acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called"—that is, effectually called—"the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends." On this it is plain that the Presbyterian *Standards* envisage the conversion of the Jews and the fullness of the Gentiles, which means the conversion of many Gentiles as a result flowing from the Jews' conversion. We should pray for, work for, and expect the conversion of the majority of Jews to Christ before the second coming.

It is foretold in many Old Testament passages. Zechariah, for example, wrote what God told him: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn"—Zechariah 12:10. Here again, we have a prophecy of the Jews being converted to Christ. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 6

Dispensational Premillenarianism

We now come to our sixth lecture in Eschatology, and our subject today is Dispensational Premillenarianism. It is important to consider Dispensation Premillenarianism, as it has been the generally-held viewpoint of most evangelical churches for the past hundred and fifty years. It has been widely promoted by radio and TV ministries, by the *Scofield Reference Bible*, by Bible institutes and colleges, and by popular books like Hal Lindsey's, *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Dispensationalists view the Jews' return to the land of Palestine, and the setting up of the nation of Israel as one of the most important conditions of the coming millennium. There are signs that dispensationalism is beginning to lose its grip on the evangelical church, with criticism coming from Reformed theology, which has weakened the general attachment to dispensationalism. Great teaching centers for promoting dispensationalism, such as the large Dallas Seminary, are starting to modify and water down their dispensational theology, though the traditional views are still widely held by many Christians.

First though, I wish to look briefly at Historic Premillennialism. Historic Premillennialism is to be clearly distinguished from Dispensational Premillennialism. It was common in the early church, and was called Chiliasm. For example, it was the view held by Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus, but was rejected by Augustine, and so generally lost favor, and was not current in the medieval church. At the Reformation, premillennialism was revived by many Anabaptists, but was rejected by Luther, Calvin, and the other main Reformers. Calvin described it as, "Too childish to refute." In the nineteenth century, it was revived and popularized again by Edward Irving, in famous lectures which he gave at the time of the General Assembly in Edinburgh, and was accepted by the Bonar brothers, Horatius and Andrew Bonar, and Robert Murray M'Cheyne. The famous London Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, was also a premillenarianist, though he does not give it a lot of room in his sermons or his writings.

Premillenarianism taught that Christ could return any day, and when he did return, it would be in order, physically, to reign for a thousand years in Jerusalem. Revelation chapter 20 is understood to teach that after a period of falling away and persecution, Christ would come and raise Christians from the dead—the first resurrection, and they will reign with Christ for those thousand years. At the end of that period, there will be a second resurrection, when the wicked will be raised and judged. The thousand-year period will be a period of peace and prosperity and gospel blessing, and the promises of the Old Testament will be fulfilled, and men will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. This millennium will end with a little season of Satan's rebellion, which will be put down by Christ, then will be the judgment, and the final state.

We turn now to look at Dispensational Premillenarianism. Dispensational Premillenarianism is

of a much more recent origin. It's been around only for the last hundred and fifty or two hundred years. But during that time, it's become very prominent, so that many thought that you couldn't be an evangelical Christian and not hold to this position. It's much more elaborate than Historic Premillennialism, and goes much further. And essentially it's not compatible with Reformed theology and sound Biblical exegesis. It is fanatically espoused by its adherents as a fundamental point of orthodoxy, and they tend to hold that those who do not hold to this view are really to be dismissed as unbelieving liberals.

Dispensationalism, as a system, was developed by J. N. Darby, whose dates are 1800 to 1892. He was one of the founders of the Plymouth Brethren. He was born in London of Anglo-Irish parents, and began his education at Westminster School, but completed it in the Trinity College, Dublin, in Ireland. He was ordained as an Anglican clergyman, and began his ministry within the Church of Ireland. He saw some early success in the conversion of Roman Catholics. But when the Archbishop required converts to swear allegiance to George IV as the rightful King of Ireland, this created antagonism amongst the Irish, and so the conversions ceased. Darby resigned in protest, and over the next few years, developed his own distinctive theology.

He began to believe that the kingdom prophesied in Isaiah, and in other Old Testament prophecies, was entirely different from the Christian church. The basic idea is that Jesus Christ came to this world in order to be King, ruling on the throne of David, over the Jews in Jerusalem, but he was rejected, and so, he turned to the Gentiles. But one day, after the age of the church, he will return to reign over the Jews. The Christian church among the Gentiles was a kind of afterthought—it was never meant to happen. Dispensationalism rejects Reformed theology and the idea that God is sovereign and has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Essentially, dispensationalists must be Arminian, believing in free will, and that there is no fixed plan of God. Dispensationalism considers all history as divided into dispensations, or economies, of God. That is, defined periods of time, during which God dealt with God in different ways and in distinctive covenants, each quite different from the others, and the way of salvation changing according to the dispensation.

Now Reformed theologians also talk about dispensations—they have the Old Testament dispensation, and the New Testament dispensation, but they are dispensations of the covenant of grace, and they have only the one way of salvation, essentially the same in the Old Testament and the New. The Old Testament saints were saved by faith in Christ, the Christ who was to come and the work which he would do. Those in the New Testament are saved by Christ too, but by looking back in faith to Christ and his work which he finished at Calvary. There are differences between the two dispensations—the blood sacrifices being offered in the Old Testament dispensation, but in essence, there is only the one covenant of grace, and all who are saved, are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Dispensationalist go much further than this. Usually they distinguish seven such periods, or dispensations. First, innocence, before the fall. Then conscience, from the fall to Noah. Then human government, from Noah to Abraham. Then promise, from Abraham to Moses. Then the law, from Moses to Christ. Then grace—the church age. And then the millennium. Following this world's history, comes the eternal state. The way to be saved for dispensationalists is different in each dispensation. Each of these periods is a time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God, and each time, man fails. Man's failure leads to the replacement of the dispensation by a new one, with a new test of obedience, and this way, a new dispensation begins. The most important of these dispensations are the last three.

Now we're thinking of the errors of dispensationalism. Dispensationalists draw a definite dis-

inction between Israel and the church. Traditional dispensationalists teach that the Israelites of the Old Testament were saved by keeping the law, keeping the commandments. Though some modern, progressive dispensationalists will tend to modify this somewhat and talk about salvation by grace. But this was the traditional view of dispensationalist, that you were saved in the Old Testaments by keeping the Ten Commandments, and the ceremonial law.

Jesus made plain to Nicodemus, who was under the old law dispensation, that no one could be saved without being born again—John 3, verse 3: “Ye must be born again.” Paul asserts that no can be justified, pardoned and accepted by God by keeping the law: “Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”—Romans 3, verse 20. We can’t be saved by keeping the commandments, because the commandments only point to our sin and condemn us. In another epistle, Paul writes, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”—Ephesians 2, verses 8–9. Salvation has always been by grace, and always will be, in order that God will get all the glory, and that man cannot in any way boast of saving himself. The problem of so many Jews was this: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God”—Romans 10, verse 3. Neither Jews nor anyone else can get to heaven by their good works, or keeping of the law, or performing of ritual. Salvation is by grace. It is made perfectly plain in Hebrews that men and women in Old Testament times perished because of unbelief, not failure to keep the commandments, but unbelief: “But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief”—Hebrews 3, verses 17–19).

The error of drawing a distinction between Israel and the church is shown when Stephen states concerning Moses: “This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us”—Acts 7:38. Here, the word in the Greek for the church is “ecclesia,” the common word used in the New Testament for “the church.” Israel in the wilderness journey was God’s church. The church is the people of from the days of Adam to the present, till the end of the world. There is essentially only one way of salvation—only one Savior—a Savior who was promised in Genesis 3, verse 15. In the Old Testament, the people looked forward in faith to what the Messiah would accomplish, and we today look back. There are, of course, superficial differences between Israel as the church in the Old Testament, and the church in the New Testament. But Israel was the church in Old Testament times. Outward membership of Israel was no more of a guarantee of salvation than outward membership of a church today: Romans 9, verse 6—“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”

Another error of the traditional dispensationalists is to distinguish sharply between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is that which belongs to the church, and the kingdom of God is that which belongs to the Jews. However, a careful study of these terms will show that Matthew used the term “kingdom of heaven” because he was largely writing with a Jewish audience in mind, and the Jews preferred to use the term “heaven” instead of using the holy name of God. The same parables are used to explain what the kingdom of heaven is in Matthew, and what the kingdom of God is in Mark and Luke.

Dispensationalists refer to the church as a parenthesis, or a kind of temporary interlude in the progress of Israel’s history. They do not see the church period as something prophesied in the

Old Testament. They note that Paul wrote to the Colossians: “I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”—Colossians 1, verse 23–27. A “mystery” is a “secret now revealed”. So the church, composed of a few Jews and many Gentiles, is something that was hidden in Old Testament times, but is now revealed. The rejection of Christ by the Jews meant that God turned from them to the Gentiles. The gospel was preached to them, many of the Gentiles believed and are saved, and so we now have the church as it is today—many Gentiles, and only a few Jews. The mystery is indeed the fact that salvation is not limited to the Jews, but that the Gentiles also are saved. Though this was largely hidden in Old Testament times, it was revealed to some of the prophets. The dispensationalists say that it wasn’t known in Old Testament times, but James makes this clear that it was known to the prophets, when speaking at the Jerusalem council. When summing up, he argues that the Gentiles do not have to keep the ceremonial law, he quotes from Amos 9, verses 11–12: “After this, I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.” He then argues: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world”—Acts 15:16–18. God knew this in the days of Amos, and indeed from the beginning of creation. God did not change his mind. It was always God’s purpose to gather the Gentiles into his church.

Now, turning to the rapture. Dispensationalism lays tremendous stress upon the rapture. Dispensationalist hermeneutics assert that the Bible and prophecy should, if at all possible, be interpreted literally, including numbers, periods of time, materials used, buildings, etc. For example, from the later chapters of Ezekiel, it would appear that the temple would be rebuilt and sacrifices offered again, and that is what they say. This is a denial of the New Testament revelation, and especially of the Book of Hebrews, where Christ is presented as the last great sacrifice which did away with the need of any other. There is a reluctance by dispensationalists to consider the whole context of a verse or chapter, to note the different forms of literature which are used in the Bible, and to interpret symbolical language as such.

Dispensationalists teach that Christ could come at any time. They lay great stress on what Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”—1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 13–17.

Dispensationalists teach that Christ will come first, to snatch away or rapture his people. When he appears, the saints who have died will arise. Graves will open, there will be a resurrection, and they will join those who are still alive, and meet the Lord in the air. From there, they will disappear

to heaven, where, for seven years, they will enjoy the wedding supper of the Lamb. There are many variations of this teaching, but this would be the most common. They believe the first resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20, verses 4 to 6, is the resurrection before the rapture. Amillennialists, and some postmillennialists believe that the first resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20 is the spiritual resurrection of the regeneration—the new birth. Other postmillennialists believe that the first resurrection is the great spiritual revival which takes place at the beginning of the millennium. Reformed theologians believe in only one physical resurrection at the end of the world, on judgment day. For dispensationalists, there are several resurrections, more than just two.

We have noted that dispensationalists speak of the church age as being a parenthesis. So when does it end? Obviously, when the church saints are raptured to heaven. Then God returns to his original plan with Israel and the Messiah. A distinction is drawn between Christ coming for his saints—the rapture, and Christ coming with his saints at the end of the seven years. At the end of the seven-year period, there will be another resurrection of the saints who died during the seven-year period. Dispensationalists assert that during the time of the great tribulation on earth—the seven-year period which follows the rapture—there will be terrible persecution. Antichrist, the beast from the sea—Revelation 13—will be revealed, and he will reign on the earth. At that time, the majority of the Jews will be converted. Then Christ will return with his saints. Christ will land on the Mount of Olives which will cleave in two, creating a new valley—Zechariah 14—and the Christian Jews will flee into this new valley which is formed in order to be saved from the army of the Antichrist—Zechariah 14:5. Christ will fight against Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon, and Antichrist will be destroyed. Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit for the thousand years—Revelation 20. Christ will now reign in Jerusalem with his believing Jews, over the whole earth, for a thousand years. All nations will be subject to him. The saints who are risen at the end of the seven year tribulation, along with the saints raptured at the beginning of that period, will live and reign in heaven for the thousand years. Two judgments will occur at this time: the judgments of the Gentiles who persecuted the people of God during the tribulation, and the judgment of the Jews—Ezekiel 20:33–38. Some dispensationalists distinguish actually seven different judgments, and seven different resurrections.

The millennium will be a time of great prosperity and peace, when the promises and the prophetic passages of the Old Testament will be fulfilled. For example, “But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”—Isaiah, chapter 11, verses 4–9. Christ’s kingdom will be universal. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him”—Psalm 72, verses 8–11.

In interpreting the final chapters of Ezekiel 40 to 48, it is argued that the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt and that sacrifices will be offered once more. This however, would undermine the

work of Christ. They say that Old Testament priests will be offering sacrifices again, but these Old Testament priests offered such sacrifices that would be an example and shadow of heavenly things—Hebrews 8, verse 5. “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”—Hebrews 9, verses 11–14. Christ’s work does away forever with animal sacrifices. These types and symbols have been replaced. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”—Hebrews 10, verse 4. Quoting again: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” One offering; perfected forever them that are sanctified. Hebrews 10, verse 14. Animal sacrifices have forever been replaced by the one sacrifice of Christ. Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body”—John 2:19–21. The earthly temple was destroyed by the Jews when they crucified Christ. But he has now built a better one, which is his body, the church. The shadows are gone, we now have the reality. There can be no returning to these shadows.

Following this glorious millennium, dispensationalists believe Satan will be loosed for a little while. He will gather the nominal Christians and unbelievers, and rebel with a great army against Christ, but he will be crushed by Christ. Then the resurrection of the saints who died during the millennium will be raised, and the second resurrection of all unbelievers take place, in contrast with the first resurrection of Revelation 20, verse 5. The final judgment of the great white throne will follow, and then the eternal state. The Jews will have their eternal state in the new earth, and the church composed of Christian Jews and Gentiles, will have their eternal state in heaven. So there’s three states in the future: heaven, earth, and hell. Many modern dispensationalists have moved from these extremes, but this will be the traditional view.

There is a real problem for all premillennialists—it is that Christ is already on the throne! He’s already reigning over heaven and earth. Peter, at Pentecost, proclaimed that God raised up Christ from the dead and placed him on the throne, on heaven’s throne, over heaven and earth: “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”—Acts 2, verses 33–36. Christ’s ascension was immediately followed by his coronation. This reigning of Christ is described by Paul to the Corinthians: “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign”—Christ must reign—“till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”—1 Corinthians 15, verses 24 to 26. Paul also refers to Christ’s coronation as immediately following his resurrection and ascension, when he writes to the Philippians: “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things

in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”—Philippians 2, verses 8–11.

For the Christ who is already reigning over all angels and men, in the beautiful sinless perfection of heaven, to return to this world, to reign over the Jews in a sinful world, would actually be a second humiliation for Christ. Surely Christ’s sufferings are over! How could Christ return to this world, when he, in his humiliation, expressed his misery in this world? For example, when he said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?”—Matthew 17, verse 17. Christ’s humiliation is over, and his exaltation is begun. He will never again fight hand to hand with the devil. He crushed his head at Calvary. He destroyed Satan on the cross. He came the first time, “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil”—Hebrews 2:14, and he succeeded in doing that.

Critical to rapture thinking are the words, “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”—1 Thessalonians 4, verse 17. There seems to be here the idea of Christians caught up into the air, but it is important to notice the second half of the verse: “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Surely this is describing the end of the world and a permanent state—we will forever be at home with the Lord. The meeting will be in the air, but it is simply the beginning of eternity. But what then is referred to by the words: “Them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”—verse 14? It refers simply to their soul’s returning with Christ from heaven, to enter into their bodies. Or, it may refer to the saints going forever to be with Christ in heaven.

The idea of multiple physical resurrections and multiple judgment days finds no support in the parables of Jesus. There is only one day of reckoning for all. For example, the dragnet captures good and bad fish, and at the end of the world, they are separated one from another—Matthew 13:47–50—one judgment day. The wheat is separate from the tares at the end of the world and not before—Matthew 13:29–30. When Christ returns, it will be to judge, and the righteous—or the sheep, will be placed on the right hand, and the goats—or the wicked, on his left—Matthew 25, verse 32.

Dispensational Premillenarianism errs in building a whole system on a very narrow space. One or two verses are pushed to extremes. There is a failure to appreciate the symbolical language of many of the passages of the Scripture, especially when dealing with prophecy. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 7

The Second Coming and the Resurrection

Today we come to our seventh lecture in Eschatology, and our subject is The Second Coming and the Resurrection. We have in past lectures looked at some of the events which must precede the second coming of Christ. For example, we believe that the Jews, as a people, must first be converted to Jesus as the Messiah. This, in turn, will lead to worldwide blessing upon the church. Others argue that Christ could come anytime. We must be careful not to be too dogmatic. Prophecy is notoriously difficult to interpret. When Christ came the first time, most people were wrong in their expectation.

When will Christ return? No one knows. Those who have tried to predict it have been proved wrong time and again. Even Jesus, when on earth, did not know when he would return. Obviously, as God, he knows everything, but as a man, he is limited, so he said, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only”—Matthew 24, verse 36. In these words, he demonstrates the reality of his manhood. The second coming will be sudden and unexpected by most, so Jesus warned, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”—Matthew 24, verse 44. There will certainly be dark days just before the end, because Jesus said, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” These words are from Matthew 24, verses 9 to 12. Our Lord implies there that there will be a great decline in Christianity. He said, “Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”—Luke 18:8. Will there be any faithful disciples left?

Following the blessing of the millennium, we are told, in Revelation 20: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”—Revelation 20, verses 7 to 10. This speaks of a final apostasy, and of great persecution just before Christ returns. After the blessing of the millennium, there will be falling away. Satan will gather nominal Christians and unbelievers, and make a final attempt to destroy the true church. The camp of the saints is surrounded, and the church is threatened with extermination. But then

the Lord will act, and fire will come from heaven and destroy Satan's forces. There will be final judgment, and Satan himself will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever.

This loosing of Satan just before the end is interesting. It creates a problem for those who follow the amillennial interpretation. Common believe today among Reformed Christians is that the thousand years begins at Calvary. There, Christ, by his great redemptive act on the cross, wrestled with Satan and crushed his head, and in the process, his heel was crushed. Jesus explained that "the strong man" had to be bound before his goods could be spoiled or robbed. In a very real sense, Jesus did bind Satan, the strong man, so that his goods could be plundered—Mark 3:27. If that is what is meant by the binding of the dragon in Revelation 20, what then is this "loosing"? This is the weak point of the amillennial argument. Surely, the work of the cross cannot be undone. The great redemptive act of Calvary was a once-for-all-time defeat of Satan. His head was crushed, and it cannot be healed. So most of the Puritans and older Divines, we understand the millennium as a period of blessing during the New Testament age, and it is followed by a time of falling away.

It takes us then to the glorious appearing. Christ's return will be clear and obvious to all. None will doubt what is happening: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"—1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. There will be a great shout, which will be heard all over the world, and indeed the universe, and that voice will raise the dead. The trumpet of God will sound, and what a trumpet blast it will be! The second coming of Christ will not be announced on radio, or television, or the social media—there will be no time for that. Jesus explains: "Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be"—Matthew 24:26–27. It will be sudden, largely unexpected, and witnessed by all who are alive.

When Christ returns, he will bring with him the souls of his people who have been enjoying paradise with him: "Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him"—1 Thessalonians 4, verse 14. These returning souls will immediately enter into the bodies which they left at death. Their bodies will be reconstituted by the miraculous creative power of God, and arise, and the soul returns into them. The Thessalonians thought that those saints who had died would miss out on the return and the appearing of Christ in his glory. But no, Paul assures them and us that, before anything else happens, the dead in Christ shall rise first—verse 16. So, before the transformation of the living, the graves will be opened and the dead arise. Then those still alive will be changed, and along with those who are risen, they will meet Christ in the air, and forever be with the Lord.

The portion of Scripture which particularly deals with the resurrection is 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. This chapter begins with Paul describing the gospel which he preached, and which the Corinthians had received, and by which they were saved. Central to that gospel is the vital truth of the resurrection of Christ, which was witnessed by many different people. But there were teachers in Corinth who were saying that there will be no resurrection. The whole idea of the resurrection of the body was ridiculed by the Greek philosophers. When Paul mentioned the resurrection on Mars Hill, in Athens, they brought an end to his sermon: "Some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter"—Acts 17:32. Paul here is writing to the Corinthians, and he argues that if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not risen, and if Christ be not risen, Paul's preaching was false, because the resurrection was central to his preaching. He said to the Romans that the Lord Jesus Christ was, "delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." But more

than that, Paul was telling the Corinthians that their faith was useless: “Your faith is also vain,” if there’s no resurrection—1 Corinthians 15:14. It implies that Paul himself was a false witness. Further, it implies that the Corinthians are still in their sins, and those that have died believing in Jesus have perished—1 Corinthians 15, verse 18. Without the resurrection of our Savior, our Savior is dead, and a dead Savior cannot save us; he could not even save himself. Paul proceeds with his powerful reasoning: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”—verse 19. When the Apostle reflects on all he has suffered to communicate the gospel—the beatings, whippings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, weariness—what was the point of it all? All his many labors were for a lie. Surely the Corinthians will not believe that, and neither will we. So Paul proceeds to assert that Christ is actually risen, and he is the firstfruits of those who died as believers, and in that sense, fell asleep. Since Jesus, the firstfruits, has risen, those who sleep in Jesus will rise too. By man came death, that is, through Adam and his first sin. So also by man, that is, Christ comes the resurrection. Christ rose first, and so those who are in Christ will arise also.

Then comes the end, when Christ delivers up his kingdom of power to the Father—verse 24. This is the kingdom he was given when he ascended after his resurrection. He was made head over all things for the benefit of his church—Ephesians 1:22. He said to his disciples, in anticipation of his coronation: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”—Matthew 28:18. “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet”—1 Corinthians 15:25. Then he hands over the kingdom of power to his Father. There are no more enemies to be fought and overcome. His success is complete, but he still, of course, remains King and Head of his people. We are told that “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”—1 Corinthians 15:26. Christ, in his personal resurrection, conquered death, and then at the end of the world, he will conquer death in raising his people from the dead. Christ, having conquered all and risen victorious over death himself, he also conquers death for his people, and merited their resurrection, so that they too cannot remain under the power of death. Paul challenges the Corinthians by reminding them what he suffered to bring the gospel to them. Why would he put himself in constant danger of hardship and persecution? What was the point of him fighting with beasts at Ephesus, “if the dead rise not?” It would seem more sensible to change one’s philosophy, and to live for the pleasures of the moment, “let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die”—verse 32. But then he warns: “Be not deceived,” evil companions will lead astray. Beware of learning from those around you, rather than from the Lord.

What is the resurrection body like? The body of the Christian which rises from the grave will be fit for eternity in heaven. In this life, our bodies are subject to aging, disease, death, and decay. But the resurrection body will be glorious, powerful, spiritual, and eternal, which will neither hunger nor thirst. It will not need sleep, as there’s no night there. Christ was able to pass through closed doors with his resurrection body, and to move quickly from one place to another, and indeed was not constantly subject to gravity. It is possible that the resurrection saints will have a similar body. They are able to meet Christ in the air when he returns.

At the point of Christ’s return, the dead Christians will rise first, then those saints who are alive will be transformed, and given similar resurrection bodies. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”—verses 51–54. At this point, death is

forever conquered for the believer, and all the effects of the curse—the curse on Adam and the human race—are removed.

The law says that sin must be punished by death, and the sinner returned to the ground out of which he was taken: “Dust thou art and unto the dust shalt thou return”—Genesis 3:19. But through the work of Christ, at the resurrection, God’s people will be able to say, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”—1 Corinthians 15:55–57. We see the godly died as the snake of death steals them, because we are all sinners. Without sin, there would be no death. But one day, the full effects of the atonement will be seen, as Christ removes the sting from the snake. We have witnessed the grave devouring all our Christian friends. It seems completely victorious, but one day, we will be able to look the grave on the face and say, Where is your victory now?

Do the wicked rise too? What happens to the ungodly when Christ returns? It will be a terrifying time for the wicked. Their false religion will be shown up for what it is. The atheists will be shown to be fools. God reveals himself in creation, and has left a witness to himself in every conscience, so it is the fool who says in his heart that there is no God—Psalm 14, verse 1. Oh, the fear that will be everywhere when the final trumpet sounds. “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”—Revelation 6:15–17.

Many who never prayed in their lifetime will now pray, but it’s too late. They know now for sure that they will receive according to their deeds, and that there is no escape. They are all sinners, and there’s no escape. Their consciences will condemn them, and every mouth shall be stopped. Some have argued that only the godly who are entitled to eternal life will arise from the dead. However, Scripture makes plain that the resurrection will be general. It is stated that good and bad will rise from the dead. Daniel’s prophecy reveals this: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”—Daniel 12, verse 2. “Many” here does not mean that some will not arise, but rather that the numbers who will arise are enormous and very many. Our Lord, when on earth, declared that there would be a general resurrection: “Marvel not at this,” Jesus said, “for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”—John 5:28–29. The same truth is revealed in the Book of Revelation: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works”—Revelation 20, verse 13.

The wicked will have bodies that cannot die, but yet are always dying. Immediately, the unconverted die, they go to hell in their souls, and so in their consciousness, and they begin to suffer there. At the end of the world, they will return in their souls to enter into their bodies. All the bodies of the ungodly will be resurrected, just like the godly. The new bodies they will be given will be suited for suffering in hell forever. Eternity in hell—what a thought! The resurrected ungodly shall feel pain in their new bodies as well as in their souls. At present, in hell they are suffering, but with their resurrection bodies, they will suffer even more. “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever”—Revelation 14, verse 11.

Now thinking about the treatment of dead bodies. It's important to remember that the bodies of believers are precious and should be treated with great respect. In regeneration, we are united to Christ. We are all composed of a body and a soul, and as such, are united to Christ, both our body and our soul are united to Christ. So even the dead body of the believer is mysteriously united to the Lord. *The Westminster Larger Catechism* gives a wonderful answer to question #86: "What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?" And the answer to that question, question #86 is: "The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day." These are great truths drawn from the Scriptures. The body of a believer is precious, being still united to Christ. It rests in the grave as on a bed. Therefore, the mutilation of bodies is wicked. It appears most Scriptural, like the saints of old, to bury a body rather than cremate him. The common modern practice of cremation arose from those who were atheists and thought that by burning a body, they could destroy it, so that there could be no resurrection or day of judgment for them. However, it does not matter what happens to the body after death. God will raise him, even if it is burned to ashes and scattered by the winds and waves to the four corners of the earth, God will cause it to arise. Even if it is sent into distant space, God the Almighty will gather it up and bring it back, resurrect the individual, and judge him. Suppose cannibals ate the body, and other cannibals ate those cannibals. God, the Almighty Creator, will assure that the individual is raised and that the body's identity will continue. It is worth remembering that every few years, every cell in our body is changed, yet the identity remains. Christ left no part of his body behind in the grave—all was transformed into his resurrection body.

When we rise, our bodies will be perfect, and like that of Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians: "For our conversation is in heaven"—or our citizenship is in heaven—"from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself"—Philippians 3:20–21. Our body today is a humble body—a body that belongs to our state of humiliation. But one day, we will have a glorified body. Further, our body will be transformed to be like that of Christ—God is able.

What about those who have deformed bodies in this world? Deformed bodies are the result of the fall, and in heaven, all the results of the fall and sin are going to be removed. Every body will be perfect. What about those who die as infants? They too will have a perfect, normal, grown human body. The same is true even of children lost by miscarriage or killed by abortion. Once the body is conceived in the womb, God creates a soul which unites with the fetus, and a separate human being is made. Elect infants who die in the womb will be part of the heavenly family of God around the throne, but they will be there as adults. For all we know, all such infants who die in the womb or as infants are elect, and so will be in heaven.

Jesus was asked by the Sadducees about marriage in heaven. They did not believe in the resurrection, and tried to catch out our Lord by asking about a woman who successively had had seven husbands, and then died childless. Who would be her husband in heaven? Jesus replied, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry,

nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven”—Matthew 22:29–30. So there will be no marriage in heaven, or special relationships of that kind. But will there be male and female? We see no reason why not. Sometimes it is asked, Will we know one another in heaven? If we know one another on earth, then why not in heaven? We will not be more ignorant there. Peter, James, and John seemed immediately able to recognize Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. The disciples had some difficulty recognizing Jesus after his resurrection, but it seemed to be because they did not expect him to be risen. Also, we are told on at least one occasion that God withheld their vision: “But their eyes were holden that they should not know him”—Luke 24:16.

It’s not simply men and women who will experience transformation when Christ returns. The universe will be, as it were, born again. Paul describes the whole creation as under the curse of God and longing for the regeneration, which will involve the formation of the new heavens and earth: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”—that’s Romans 8, verses 19 to 23. The creation, as it came from the hand of God in the beginning, was very good, and is so described even by God himself. However, when man sinned, even the inanimate creation was affected. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”—Genesis 3, verses 17–19. Thorns and thistles, weeds and nettles were produced. Also death and disease affected all life. Further, even the physical world was affected with storms, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, volcanoes. These things show the creation writhing in agony, waiting for the day of deliverance, when Christ will come again and restore the creation. The whole creation is waiting for the revelation of the children of God.

Peter speaks about the change which will take place in the world. He answers the mockers who object and say, Why has Christ not yet returned? They say, The years are passing, and Christ has not come. But Peter responds, noting that it was like that in the days of Noah. Then there were scoffers too. God gave to the ancient world one hundred and twenty years in which to repent. “But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”—2 Peter 3, verses 8–9. The Lord, in his kindness, gives people plenty of time to repent and prepare for his return. But then, one day suddenly he will come. And Peter describes what it will be like: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation with godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”—2 Peter 3, verses 10–13.

The world will end with the coming of Christ. The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll

and pass out of existence—Revelation 6:14. The earth will be consumed with fire, and out of the conflagration will come the new heavens and the new earth. Then will be final judgment and the eternal state. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 8

The Doctrine of the Judgment

We now come to lecture #8 in Eschatology, and our subject is The Judgment. Following the resurrection, comes the Final Judgment. Historical Millennialists and Dispensationalists have several resurrections, and several Judgments. Dispensationalists, for example, have a Judgment of the saints at the rapture, and then, seven years later when Jesus returns again, a Judgment of the Jews who were converted during the seven year period of the tribulation. They also have a Judgment of the nations, which is separate, and they have the Judgment of the great white throne on the last day following the millennium. The Bible, however, describes only one Judgment Day, and it comes at the end of world history. True, when an individual dies, they go either to heaven or hell. But this is not a judgment as such, and there is no appearing before a judge, nor examination of evidence. From the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it is plain that, when the unconverted die, they open their eyes immediately in hell—Luke 16:23. In contrast, the converted open their eyes in heaven. The angels carried the soul of Lazarus to Abraham’s bosom—verse 22. For the true Christian, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord—2 Corinthians 5, verse 8. The psalmist says, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness”—Psalm 17, verse 15. An individual’s destiny is fixed at the moment he dies. John the Baptist warned, “Now also, the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringing not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire—Luke 3, verse 9. In Ecclesiastes, it is explained that as the tree falls, so shall it lie: “If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be”—Ecclesiastes 11, verse 3.

So what then is the purpose of the Judgment Day? It will change nothing. The destiny of each individual is already fixed at death. The purpose of the Judgment Day is to reveal God’s justice and mercy. It will demonstrate the righteousness of the righteous, and the wickedness of the wicked. God’s people will be openly acknowledged and acquitted. The wickedness of the wicked will be fully exposed. All secrets of every heart and life will be revealed, and as it has been said, there will be a resurrection of reputations of the righteous who have been maligned in this world. Hypocrites will be unmasked. Every mouth shall be stopped, and all mankind will acknowledge that God is just, and right, and true, and that his judgment is just.

John received a revelation of what will happen at the end of the world. There will be a great falling away from the faith. Satan, being loosed, will gather his forces to persecute and to destroy the Christian church. It will seem as if the Lord’s people are about to be exterminated. The camp of God’s people, the church, will be, as it were, surrounded. But then fire comes from heaven, and burns up their enemies. Satan is arrested and cast into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night for ever and ever. The end of the world has come. The Judgment Day has arrived: “And I saw a

great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”—Revelation 20, verses 11–15.

We notice here that a great white throne is set up. It is a great throne, because it is vastly above every other throne. And before this throne, every other throne, and every other individual will have to give account. It is the judgment throne of God, the Supreme Being. It is white, that none worry that he will not receive justice. The throne is pure, and the justice administered will be perfect. No bribery or corruption will take place. No preferential treatment will be offered to any. God is no respecter of persons—Acts 10:34.

Who will judge the world? Who sits on the throne? The One from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. Paul explains further that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”—Acts 17:31. Christ humbled himself to death for the salvation of his people, and then God exalted him by his resurrection, his ascension, his sitting at the right hand of God, and then his coming to judge the world at the last day.

In the British justice system, juries composed of fellow citizens are employed, so that the individual is judged by his peers. God will judge us by a man, again, one of ourselves, who “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”—Hebrews 4:15. Jesus fully understands what it is like to live in this world, constantly tempted by sin and Satan. None will be able to turn round to the Judge and say, “You do not know how hard it was to live in this world.” Our Lord stated, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him”—John 5:22–23. So it is the God-man, the Savior who died on the cross for our sins, who will judge us. And that is a great encouragement to the Christian. Our Mediator, our Friend, and our Brother is the Judge.

Who will be judged? John states: “I saw the dead, small and great stand before God.” The kings and mighty men of the earth will be there, but also the ordinary folk, the working men and women, the beggars, and the savages. It does not matter what happened to the body. We are told, “The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.” Some are drowned at sea. Their bodies are eaten by crabs, and other sea creatures. These creatures are eaten by others. But still the sea will give up those who died in it. Even if the body is burnt and the ashes scattered in the water, the sea will give up the dead which are in it. Almighty God will raise them up. Death will deliver up all who die. Hell, Hades, the realm of the dead, and even the realm of the wicked dead will send their dead to stand before the throne. Nebuchadnezzar and Silas, the Pharaohs and the Caesars, Stalin and Hitler, they will be there, along with the peasants, the slaves, and the disabled. The great patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the Reformers, along with ordinary Christian men and women, boys and girls will all be there. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and atheists will all be there. Certainly Christians will not be judged. But the Scripture is clear that all will be judged. Paul wrote, “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of

Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”—Romans 14:10–12. Paul includes himself and the Roman Christians among those who are judged. In another epistle, he further emphasizes this when he wrote: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences”—2 Corinthians 5, verses 10–11. Christians must also appear before God’s Judgment Seat to give their account.

What is the standard used in judgment? We are told that “the books were opened, and another book was opened, which was the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” God partially reveals himself and his will in nature, and in the human conscience. Sadly, individuals do not even live up to the standard of their own consciences. God has given a much fuller revelation in his law and gospel in the Scriptures. The Bible teaches what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. Judges on earth judge according to the law of the land, and so the Divine Judge judges according to the law of God. Sin is a crime against God, and is defined as, “any lack of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” The books which are opened on the Judgment Day contain the complete record of our lives, and our lives are measured and judged according to God’s Word, the Scriptures.

We are also told here about a book of life. It is important, of course, to remember that the language is symbolical. There is no actual book, but it is as if there was, and the picture or metaphor of a book helps us to understand what is implied. So the book of life is, as it were, a register of those who are entitled to receive eternal life. This book was referred to several times in the Old Testament. With regard to the enemies of the Messiah, the psalmist states: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous”—Psalm 69, verse 28. In another Psalm, we find the words: “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written”—Psalm 139, verse 16. Daniel is told about a time of severe persecution, and some would be preserved because their name was in the book: “There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.” In the New Testament, there are seven references to this book in Revelation. The persevering faithful are encouraged by Christ: “I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”—Revelation 3, verse 5. Later, we are told of the beast that arises out of the sea: “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”—Revelation 13, verse 8. Here, the book of life is equated with the elect. Later, we read of those “whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world”—Revelation 17, verse 8. This makes plain that the names were entered into this book in eternity, before the creation of the world. None shall enter heaven, but those whose names are in the book of life—Revelation 21, verse 27. A warning is given to those who remove or delete part of the Scriptures, that “God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”—Revelation 22, verse 19.

So whose names are in the book of life? It is plain that it is the elect of God. But who are the elect? Only God knows. Another way of looking at the book of life is to think of it as all true Christians. John wrote: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath

not life”—1 John 5:12. We possess the Son of God when we, by faith, receive and embrace him as our personal Savior. He is freely offered to all, however, those who are dead in sin see nothing precious in Christ, hate him, and will not believe in him. Those who are in the elect are effectually called and regenerated, and convicted of their sin and need of a Savior, and are granted the gift of faith to believe in him. All the elect will eventually, in this life, believe in Jesus.

Revelation 22 warns of some whose names will be removed from the book of life. Surely, if the book contains the names of the elect, this can never happen. But then, there are many who think their names are in the book of life. They show, by their rejection of Scripture, that they are not true believers, and so, in that sense, their names are removed. Also, it is here a warning to the faithful. Paul warned the Corinthians: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”—1 Corinthians 10:12). There is a huge difference between thinking you stand, and actually standing. On the Judgment Day, we could say that the first book considered is the book of life. All whose names are in the book of life will enter heaven. And all whose names are not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. So a radical distinction is drawn between the righteous and the wicked. There is no gradation between the two. There is no dubiety as to who gets to heaven.

Sometimes it is stated that we are justified by faith in this life, but we will be justified by works on the Judgment Day. There is a sense in which this is true. Paul wrote: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”—Romans 5, verse 1. Our initial justification is by faith alone. It is totally on the basis of the work of Christ. He atoned for our sin, and his merit is our righteousness. James then writes that we are justified by works, because our works show the nature of our faith, and whether it is real saving faith or not: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works”—James 2:17–18. He adds: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”—verse 24. He concludes: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”—verse 26. Jesus said: “By their fruits ye shall know them”—Matthew 7:20. In that sense, we shall be judged by our works on the Judgment Day, whether they be good or evil.

Now, thinking of the Judgment Day itself. Our Lord Jesus presents us with a very vivid picture of that day in Matthew’s Gospel, in chapter 25: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left”—Matthew 25, verses 31–33. When Christ returns, it will be to judge, not to rapture the saints, not to perform some preliminary judgment of the nations. Every man and woman will be brought before him, and he will separate them as a shepherd does the sheep from the goats. One group will be set on his right hand, and the other on his left. To those on the right hand, he will say: “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—verse 34. To them is given the new heavens and the new earth. To those on the left, he will say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”—verse 41. It is worth noticing that hell was prepared initially for the devil and his angels, and not for mankind. But sinners who do not believe in Jesus, and reject the gospel, will end up there. And then it’s added: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”—verse 46. It is not some temporary judgment, but a final one. The word that is used in the Greek for describing the state of the righteous and the wicked is the same: *aionios*—eternal. For the one enters eternal life and the other enters eternal misery.

The basis for the Judgment is enlightening. He shall say to those on his right hand, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me”—verses 35–36. Interestingly, the godly feel that they have done nothing worthy of heaven: “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?”—verses 37–39. But the Judge responds: “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”—verse 40. Where true faith is, it cannot remain alone, and it must express itself in works. These works demonstrate the reality of the faith. Showing love to a Christian for Christ’s sake, shows that a man or a woman has been born again. Love to Christ and his people is a great mark of the Christian. Summarily, we see the judgment of the wicked. The King will say to those on his left hand: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not”—verses 41–43. But they are pictured as responding in surprise: “Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?”—verse 44. But the Judge explains: “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me”—verse 45. As we noted, where real faith exists, it will express itself in love. A lack of care for the suffering of God’s children shows a lack of love for Christ. No work done in faith and love for Christ will go unrewarded. The smallest action of love and kindness shown to a child of God is appreciated: “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward”—Matthew 10:42.

Some people might think that, from this, it is their good works that, in a way, balance out their evil works. Most of us have this idea of the balances, and hope that their good works will eventually outweigh their evil works. But this is contrary to the true Christian religion. But many professing Christians think that way. There is, and always have been many hypocrites, self-righteous people in the church. Jesus told a parable to explain the impossibility of us being saved by our good works. Think, he said, if you have a servant or a slave working in a field, and at the end of the day he comes home, you do not say to him, Sit there till I prepare a meal for you. You do not thank your servant for doing that which was commanded him to do, and which it was his duty to do. So Jesus concludes: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do”—Luke 17, verse 10. Our duty is to keep all the commandments, all the time. We are constantly to be doing good works. If we are to be judged according to our works, none of us would get to heaven. One sin is enough to condemn us to hell. We can only be saved by trusting in Christ to save us. His good works are meritorious. His death atones for our sins. His blood washes away all our guilt. We have no merit but the imputed merit of Christ. However, once we are saved, our works show that we are truly saved. And these works are purified from wrong motives and faults by the blood of Christ, and so they are pleasing to God.

Thinking now of rewards and punishment. Will there be different degrees of punishment in hell? And on the other hand, will there be varying degrees of reward in heaven? Jesus makes plain that that is the case. He states that there will be some in a worse hell than others: “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe

unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of Judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of Judgment, than for thee”—Matthew 11:20–24. Some had greater privileges. There were those in Chorazin and Bethsaida who saw the miracles of Christ, which were signs from heaven that Jesus was Messiah. There were people in Capernaum who experienced what it was for Jesus to live amongst them. These people of Galilee had heard wonderful teaching and had seen his holy life. Jesus is saying that the heathen cities like Tyre and Sidon will get off lighter on the Day of Judgment than these privileged people. Sodom is set out in Scripture as the most wicked city because of its immorality, yet Jesus argues that if it had witnessed the teaching and miracles of Christ, it would have repented. From this, we can gather that there will be different degrees of punishment in hell. The greater our privileges, the more we know of the law of God and of the gospel, and the more we witness around us of true Christianity, the greater our sufferings will be in hell, if we end up there.

One of the parables would seem to teach that the rewards of the righteous are the same, however long, and however diligently they labor for God. Jesus spoke of the owner of a vineyard who hired some men to work for a penny a day—or a denarius a day, which was then the going rate for laborers. Later that day, he went out and he found other laborers unemployed, and he told them also to go and to work in the vineyard, and he would give them what was appropriate. In the late afternoon, he found other unemployed workers, and he sent them also into the vineyard, promising to pay them. At the end of the day, the laborers were called and given their wages, starting with those who had worked only for one hour. He gave each of them a penny. When those who had worked all day came, they thought they would get more. But they also got a penny. They then complained: “These last have wrought for one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day”—Matthew 20, verse 12. But the owner of the vineyard rightly answered one them, saying, “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen”—Matthew 20:13–16. This parable is simply emphasizing, though, that salvation is by grace, and none of us have any merit. We cannot demand anything. We must not have the attitude of the Pharisees. We all who trust in Jesus as our Savior and follow him will get heaven. Some have only labored a short time, but yet they too will get heaven. The thief who was saved as he died on the cross beside Jesus will get the same heaven as the apostle or missionary who labored all their life for the master.

However, there are some other parables which teach that although all who get to heaven, there will be differences of reward in heaven. The parable of the talents—Matthew 25, verses 14–30), and the parable of the pounds—Luke 19:11–27, both indicate that the rewards will vary. Further, we are commanded by Christ: “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal”—Matthew 6, verse 20. Wealth should be accumulated in the bank of heaven, rather than in the earthly banks. Zeal and godliness are noted by God. Humble, faithful labor for Christ is rewarded. In the parable of the unjust steward, it concludes: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations”—Luke 16, verse 9. There a

specially-blessed heaven for charitable Christians. All who have saving faith in Christ get to heaven, but some will have a greater heaven than others. All will be full, but some will have a greater capacity to enjoy heaven. Shells on the seashore vary in size, but when the tide comes in, they are full of water. Paul writes interesting words to the Corinthians: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire”—1 Corinthians 3:11–15. It is made clear that, on the Judgment Day, some will be saved, but their work lost. If we build with wood, hay, and stubble, it might look impressive in this world, and receive much praise from man, but it will not stand the test of the fire of the day of Judgment. You might be thought of highly here, but on the last day, there will be no reward for this work.

Reward is also meant to be an incentive to the Christian. Our great incentive is, of course, the cross. Paul states: “For the love of Christ constraineth us”—2 Corinthians 5:14. But yet, Christ encourages us: “For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward”—Mark 9:41. Paul himself states: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”—Philippians 3, verse 14. He wants his beloved Philippians to be richly rewarded. “I desire,” he says, “fruit that may abound to your account”—Philippians 4:17. We are warned, “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”—Revelation 3:11.

Will the sins of God’s people be revealed? When we become Christians, all our sins are pardoned and washed away. If they were to be revealed on the Judgment Day, would that not be a form of punishment, and leave us suffering and ashamed? Surely Christ has suffered for our sins, and they are all blotted out. We are told: “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us”—Psalm 103, verse 12. East and west will never meet, so surely, we will never meet our sins again. Yet, we are told that the books shall be opened, and we will be judged according to our works. Indeed, Jesus warns his disciples: “That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of Judgment”—Matthew 12:36. All our words are recorded—what a thought! There cannot be punishment for the Lord’s people, but all their sins will be revealed and shown to be sin. This will, in turn, encourage the song of the redeemed: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”—Revelation 1, verses 5–6. By this stage, all Christians will be perfectly holy, so there will be no room for pride, or boasting, or envy. All Christians will be full of love to one another, and to their Savior.

Another interesting point is that you shall judge angels. Paul explains that Christians will have a role in the Judgment: “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?”—1 Corinthians 6:2–3. Christians in Corinth were falling out with one another, and suing each other at law. Paul asks, Are there no wise men among you to whom you can go for judgment, rather than to take your disputes before the heathen. Surely it is better to suffer loss than to allow such a terrible witness before the world. Somehow, Christians will join Christ in the Final Judgment. They will even be involved in pronouncing sentence on angels. Much is mysterious, but some things are clear. We rejoice with the apostle, who could say, as his end approached: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”—2 Timothy 4, verse 8. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 9

The Doctrine of Hell

Today we come to lecture #9 in our series on Eschatology, and our subject today is Hell. No doctrine is more unpopular today than the Biblical teaching concerning the everlasting punishment of unbelievers. Even evangelical churches are reluctant to proclaim that the unconverted will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever. When liberalism came into the churches in the nineteenth century, the doctrine of the Universal Fatherhood of God became very popular. This led, in turn, to the idea that because every man and woman was thought to be a child of God, therefore God could not possibly cast them, his children, into hell forever. So from this arose the false doctrine of Universalism—the idea that all will eventually be saved. Up till the late nineteenth century, it was recognized that in a very general sense, God as Creator could be thought of as parent to all. There are a few verses in Scripture which give some support to that idea. For example, Paul, preaching to the philosophers of Athens, quotes with approval, a heathen poet, who said, “We are also his offspring”—Acts 17:28. This, however, was not seen as a father-child relationship, but simply that God was the Creator and Originator of man.

The great emphasis of Scripture is actually quite different. It is that we only become God’s children by adoption: Romans 8:15—“Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” You cannot adopt your own child. In another place, Paul states: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”—Galatians 3:26. Unbelievers are not the children of God. Indeed, Jesus can say to the Jews: “Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” As fallen children of Adam, we are all born children of the devil, and need to be converted and adopted to become the children of God, and so to have the favor and everlasting love of our Divine Father.

Postmodernism today is even more radical. Political correctness demands that we affirm everyone else’s views. It is argued that everyone has their own truth. Postmodernism is totally against objective truth, and the idea that there is only one way of salvation, and that the followers of other religions will perish. To assert such views as these, in the eyes of the Postmodernists, is to be guilty of a hate crime. The idea is that whatever you believe is right for you, but you must not impose your views on others. Strangely, these views have totally captured the popular mind in the West. But then, these views have taken over the universities, the schools, the media, and the government. This philosophy is used to promote and exalt all kinds of sexual immorality. Freedom to practice the various perversions condemned by the law of God in Scripture is placed on the same level as ending slavery and racism. To speak of a Judgment Day, and the punishment of sin is therefore extremely unpopular, and sadly, the spirit of the age has invaded the Christian church. Some prominent and respected evangelical theologians, such as John Stott, and Philip E. Hughes, and Clark

Pinnock, have been affected to the extent that they have argued against the traditional doctrine of everlasting punishment. We shall return to this subject later.

Looking now at Biblical words for Hell. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, there are two main words for Hell. First, there is the word “Sheol.” It has several meanings, and these must be determined by the context. It can refer to the grave, or to the state of the dead, or to the place of torment for the wicked. The other word is “Gehenna.” It is the place of punishment of sinners. Originally, it meant the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. It was just outside Jerusalem, and it was there that children were burnt in the worship of the heathen god, Moloch. Good King Josiah desecrated the heathen shrine and turned it into the rubbish tip of the city. There fires burned constantly, destroying the rubbish, and there the worms fed upon the rotting remains of animals and food. Therefore, it presented a picture of hell—the dunghill and the rubbish tip of the world, a loathsome place, where worms and fire will be constantly feeding upon those rebels who end up there. In the Greek of the New Testament, the word used is “Hades,” and it’s the equivalent of the Hebrew word Sheol. It can refer to the grave, or to a place where all go when they die. But more commonly, it’s used for the place of eternal punishment for unbelievers.

Now thinking about Hell in the Old Testament. From the very beginning of Scripture, it was revealed that this life is not the end, and that there is a Judgment Day, and a Heaven, and a Hell. We are told, for example, that “Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him.” Others died, but he went straight to heaven to dwell with God. Jude tells us that Enoch prophesied, “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him”—Jude, verses 14–15. We are assured by Jude that Enoch told these things to the ancient world. Even in these early days, it was clear that the wicked would be punished. David, in the Psalms, speaks of Hell as a place of punishment for the wicked: “The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands...The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God”—Psalm 9, verses 16–17. The prophets also speak of Hell. Isaiah describes it in vivid terms: “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh”—Isaiah 66, and verse 24. These words are picked up by our Lord Jesus when describing the eternal misery of unbelievers and hypocrites. Daniel prophesies concerning the resurrection, that it will not simply for the reward of the righteous, but also for the punishment of the wicked: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”—Daniel 12, verse 2. The prophet Malachi further describes the punishment of unbelievers: “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch”—Malachi 4, verse 1. So even in Old Testament times, it is plain that those who die in their sins go to a place of conscious punishment.

Turning now to think of Hell in the New Testament. No one speaks more about Hell, actually, than our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is concerned to warn men and women to flee from the wrath to come. He himself suffered Hell on the cross to deliver us from the Hell to come. He leaves us in no doubt that rejecting his gospel and his saving work at Calvary will not only result in you missing heaven, but will also cause you to be thrown into Hell—a Hell of everlasting misery. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ warns: “And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from

thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell”—Matthew 5, verse 30. If your hand is causing you to sin, you should take drastic action—Hell is an awful place to end up in. Later, in the same sermon, Jesus reveals that there is a broad way that leads to eternal misery: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat”—Matthew 7, verse 13. Our Lord tells us on another occasion, the parable of the dragnet which captures good and bad fish. The fishermen then separate the edible fish from the useless: “So it will be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”—Matthew 13:49–50. So there’s a place of great misery, of which Jesus spoke, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth in pain. Who can imagine ending up in such a state? Similarly, in the parable of the wedding feast, the command was given concerning the man who entered without a wedding garment—without the righteousness of Christ to clothe him: “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”—Matthew 22, verse 13. On the Judgment Day, which he explains is ahead of us all, it will be said to the unrighteous: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;” and it is added: “These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”—Matthew 25, verses 41 and 46. Mark records how Jesus spoke of some as being “cast into hell fire, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”—Mark 9:47–48.

There can be no doubting that Jesus taught that there are two destinations in eternity. There is a Hell as well as a Heaven. That Hell is a place of deep misery, weeping, and gnashing of teeth, a place of horrible pain, with the worm eating and the fire burning. Now of course, the worm and the fire are symbolical, but they do convey the idea of extreme pain. Further, this state is called everlasting punishment, and this lasting forever is the most awful aspect of it. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. There is no end of the pain and suffering.

The apostles described Hell in similar terms. Paul writes of the coming of Christ: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”—2 Thessalonians 1:8–9. This is one great motive for Paul’s preaching and missionary work. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”—2 Corinthians 5:11. Peter warns: “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished....But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness,...These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever”—that’s 2 Peter 2, verses 9, 12, 13, and 17. The most graphic descriptions are to be found in the Book of Revelation, where it is said of the wicked: “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name”—Revelation 14:10–11. Later, it is said: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”—Revelation 20, verse 15. There is the idea of exclusion from Heaven: “For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie”—Revelation 22:15. And so those outside are missing the blessings of

Heaven. But there is also the idea of positive punishment. Hell is described as a lake of fire. Few pains are so unbearable as burns. Here, we are told of the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever. The fire is unquenchable—it never goes out: “they gnawed their tongues for pain”—Revelation 16, verse 10. And it is a bottomless pit—Revelation 20, verse 3—where there is never ending, descending further and further into rebellion against God and blaspheming his name, and so experiencing more and more of his wrath.

As we have shown, this is the teaching of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. This has been the traditional teaching of the church for the past two thousand years. However, with the growth of higher criticism casting doubt on the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and liberalism undermining the penal substitutionary atonement, doubts began to surface about Hell. How could a loving God punish men and women, all mankind, forever in Hell? Some have gone on to advocate Universalism, the idea that every man and woman will eventually be saved. There are two forms of this teaching. Some have advocated that there are many roads to God. This is pluralistic Universalism. It teaches that all religions provide a way of salvation for their followers. Some get to heaven through Islam, others through Hinduism. Humanists have their own path. This pluralism is directly contradicted by Christ, who taught: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”—John 14, verse 6. There is only one way to heaven, and that is through Christ.

The other form of Universalism is Christian Universalism. This position agrees that we can only be saved through Christ, but argues that Christ atoned for the sins of the whole world, so that, at the end of the day, the whole world will be saved through the mediatorial work of Christ. There are variations, with some speaking of a kind of purgatory after death, when the individual is purified and some punishment is endured. Traditional Roman Catholicism, for example, taught that there is a purgatory, but it is for believers who are purified there before going to heaven. Purgatory of all kinds undermines the finished work of Christ, who atoned for all our sins, and only ascended up to heaven when he had purged our sins—Hebrews 1, verse 3. But Roman Catholicism also believes in a Hell of everlasting suffering for the wicked.

Others, who hold to a Christian Universalism, assert that the unconverted will get a second chance to accept Christ as Savior after death. Jesus, however, taught: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”—John 3, verse 3. He also taught that the rich man went straight to Hell when he died—Luke 16, verse 23. In the parable of the ten virgins, there was no second chance for those who had no oil in their lamps—Matthew 25, verse 12. Jesus even warned respected professing Christians, when he said: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”—Matthew 7, verses 21–23. From this, it is plain that many will not be saved, even many church members, preachers, and miracle workers. There is not a hint of a second chance after death for those who die as unbelievers.

Now, looking at Conditional Immortality. The false teaching of Conditional Immortality has recently become quite popular. It is the view that only true Christians will live forever, and so experience everlasting life. Many today regard the idea of God forevermore, throughout the endless ages of eternity punishing men and women as totally unacceptable. They ask, How could a loving God ever do that? Does the Bible not say, “God is love”—1 John 4:8 and 16? Surely, this implies that love is the nature of God, and so they reason that it is essential for God to show love to his

creatures. This reasoning, however, forgets that God is not simply love—he is also truth, and justice, and wisdom, and holiness, and power. Just as the Scripture says “God is love,” it also says, “God is a consuming fire”—Hebrews 12:29. That is terrifying. But it would be a blessing to the church today if Christians, and all mankind in general, are more aware of it, and have more of the fear of God. Furthermore, when Scripture states that God is love, it means that God is holy love and just love. Interestingly, in both the Old Testament and New Testament, we find words of adoration, focusing specifically on the holiness of God. The Seraphim, in Isaiah 6, are seen in that awesome vision by Isaiah, as crying to one another: “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory”—Isaiah 6, verse 3. We are told concerning the living creatures in John’s vision of Heaven: “They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”—Revelation 4, verse 8. More than anything else, holiness is revealed to us as distinctive of God. Nowhere in the Bible can the words be found, “Love, love, love, is the Lord God Almighty,” though this would be true of God as well. God is all his attributes. God is holy, God is just, God is true, God is wise, God is loving.

Sometimes it is even argued that it would be unjust for God to punish someone forevermore in Hell. Surely, they say, no sin committed in time could demand everlasting punishment. But what is forgotten is that sins against an infinitely good God demand everlasting punishment. Also, sinners in Hell go on blaspheming God, and so deserve further punishment. Exalting man, as over against God, is what is taking place here. There is always that tendency of man to make God in his own image. Scripture lays particular emphasis on the holiness of God, which is essentially the “otherness” of God. God’s holiness is especially his majesty, his exaltedness, his separation, as well as his moral purity. Modern man thinks of himself, and of his own work, and of his own rights, and thinks very little of the greatness or the glory of God. Today’s churches make God small, and man big. It is because God is regarded as small, that a sin against God is not seen as deserving eternal punishment. The Puritans rightly taught that even one sin against such a great and good God deserves eternal Hell. Sadly, all of us commit millions of sins in thought, word, and deed in our lifetime. The worst sin of all is rejecting the Savior, the Son of God who came into this world and suffered so much to atone for our sins: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him”—Hebrews 2, verse 3. It was a wicked crime to crucify him, but it is an even worse crime to crucify him a second time, and that is the way unbelief is regarded in Scripture: “They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame: Hebrews 6, verse 6. The writer to the Hebrews adds: “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”—Hebrews 10, verses 28–29. To ignore Christ and his work, and the call to put our faith in him, is regarded by God as a great insult, and is therefore worthy of the most awful punishment. It is because God is diminished and the work of Christ despised, while man is exalted, that modern theologians find the eternal conscious punishment of human beings incredible and unacceptable.

Now there are different forms of this teaching of Conditional Immortality, or Annihilationism, as it’s sometimes called. Some argue, for example, that all human beings are annihilated at death, and only the saved are raised at the resurrection. This is the belief held by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Socinians, and as we showed elsewhere, it’s unbiblical. The more common form, among those who claim to follow the Bible—many modern evangelicals—is that the conscious punishment

of the wicked after death is temporary, and then they are annihilated. They argue that it is said in Scripture to be eternal, because eventually the unbelievers are annihilated, and so, destroyed forever—eternally destroyed. Their experience of punishment is temporary, but the punishment itself is eternal, in that it ends their existence forever. Such theologians would take a verse like: “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord”—2 Thessalonians 1:9, and reason that the destruction means complete destruction, so that the wicked no longer exist. We will return to this matter later to show that, while it could mean that, yet the rest of Scripture shows that this interpretation is not accurate.

It is also argued that only God is immortal: “The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting”—1 Timothy 6, verses 15–16. God, of course, is eternal and immortal in a way that no creature is. He has no beginning, and will have no end. He is independent and self-existent. He is dependent on no one. Man has a beginning, and man is dependent on God every moment for his continued existence.

Further, it is argued that eternal life is something which only believers attain. Scriptures such as the following are quoted: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”—John 3, verse 36. From this, it is stated that only those who believe in the Son of God have everlasting life. But in this verse, everlasting life means life in heaven. The existence of those in Hell is described as the second death. It is a constant dying, and yet complete death is impossible.

Considering that the church has always believed in the conscious experience of eternal punishment of Hell, it is somewhat surprising to see how popular Conditional Immortality is becoming. John Stott was an Anglican evangelical who wrote many excellent books, and was hugely influential amongst evangelical Christians across the world. It was therefore surprising when he questioned the everlasting nature of punishment in Hell, in the book, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, published in 1988. Others who promote these heretical views are Philip Hughes, and Clark Pinnock, John Wenham, and Edward William Fudge.

Hell is eternal, conscious suffering. This is revealed in a number of Biblical passages. Jesus speaks of a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth”—Matthew 12:13. This involves ongoing suffering. He further describes Hell as a place where there is fire that never shall be quenched: “Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”—Mark 9:44–48. If Hell is a place where there is fire that is never quenched, it obviously needs fuel, something to burn forever. The worm will die if it has nothing to feed on. So the whole idea of fire that is never quenched necessitates ongoing existence for the wicked, and similarly the undying worm demands the ongoing existence of the wicked. The Judgment is portrayed for us in Matthew, chapter 25. The final statement there, in which Christ states with regard to the wicked: “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal”—verse 46. In the Greek original, the same word is used to describe the life of the righteous and the eternity of the suffering of the wicked. If eternal life goes on forever, and Heaven is everlasting, conscious enjoyment of God, then Hell must be everlasting punishment by God also. There is no end envisaged in the Hell that the rich man went to, in the rich man and Lazarus: “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame”—Luke 16:23–24. “And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us,

that would come from thence”—that’s verse 26. There is no second chance. None who go to Hell will ever get out. The book of Revelation describes the endlessness of Hell: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever”—Revelation 20, verse 10. And then it’s stated: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”—verse 15. Earlier in the book, we are told, with regard to the wicked: “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb”—Revelation 14, verse 10. Surely that must be unending suffering. Sometimes it is argued that the existence of Hell would be a blot on God’s universe forever. How could God allow that there should be a place of blasphemy, and rebellion, and suffering throughout eternity. What is often forgotten in this type of reasoning is that God will be glorified in the destruction of the wicked, just as he is glorified in the salvation of the saints. God glorifies his mercy, his love, and wisdom in saving sinners. God also glorifies and displays his justice and wrath in punishing the wicked forever. Hell will be a constant reminder to the people of God, what our Savior endured for us, and what he saved us from. This will take nothing from our eternal songs of praise, but rather will add to them.

One problem many have is how they could possibly be happy in heaven, thinking of their family suffering in Hell. What about a loving parent, a dear spouse, a child who is precious to us? It is indeed hard for us to envisage ourselves being content while they are being punished. However, on the Judgment Day, we will see the true wickedness of the unbeliever, as we have never seen it in this life. We will know as we are known. We will have such love and admiration for God that we will acquiesce fully in his judgment. Amen.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

by Rev. William Macleod

Module 7 ~ Lecture 10

The Doctrine of Heaven

We now come to our final lecture on Eschatology, lecture #10, and our subject is Heaven. Having dealt with the eternal state of the wicked, we now come to consider the eternal, everlasting bliss which lies ahead for the righteous. The Great Judge will say to the unbelievers, “Depart from me, ye cursed.” But he says to those who trust in him, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—Matthew 25, verse 34. How awful is that word “depart”—depart forever. But how wonderful is that word “come”—come and dwell with me forever. Jesus had comforted his disciples as he was about to leave them the night before he was crucified. He said: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”—John 14, verses 1–3.

But what will this Heaven, this house of many mansions, be like? Just as with Hell, the pictures and symbolism of Heaven presented to us are in graphic and metaphorical terms. None of us have been there, and therefore, we have difficulty in picturing. It will be very different from our present state. In many ways, the best we can say is in negative terms, contrasting Heaven with the troubles and sufferings of this present time. We know that it will be a very good place, and the best that the Almighty, the all-wise God, can give us. God knows us, and he knows how to make us really happy. He created us to glorify and enjoy him. In this world, because of the fall, we often fail miserably. But in Heaven, we will succeed perfectly, glorifying and enjoying God. All the sin and the misery which characterizes the state into which we fell shall be gone forever. Even in this life, we who have been born again, from time to time enjoy moments of felt fellowship with God, and to us they are, as it were, Heaven on earth. And in this way, we experience “joy unspeakable and full of glory”—1 Peter 1:8. And if those moments here below are so sweet, how wonderful will Heaven be?

Where will Heaven be? Obviously there is a place distinct from this world where Heaven is at the moment. We are told that Enoch and Elijah went bodily to Heaven, so there must be a location where they are living. Our Lord Jesus, having risen from the dead, on the fortieth day, ascended up to Heaven as the disciples watched, and a cloud received him out of their sight. So he too is living bodily in Heaven. Two angels then appeared to the disciples and said: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”—Acts 1:11. So at the present time, there is a place distinct from this earth, and it is called Heaven. God is omnipresent, yet he is especially present in Heaven. This is the dwelling place of the angels, who, although they do not have bodies,

are not infinite like God, but spatially limited. They can only be in one place at one time. Here also, the souls of the saints are who have died, and they dwell with their Savior. It is described as being “above us,” and yet it’s not somewhere that can be reached by a space rocket. And yet, at the same time, it’s not far away, because Saul of Tarsus could see clearly into Heaven from the Damascus Road, seeing the man, Christ Jesus, and speaking to him: “And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do”—Acts 9, verse 5–6. Heaven, it would appear, is a kind of parallel universe, not that far away, and yet impossible to see with a human telescope. It is interesting how Jesus, after his resurrection, could appear and then disappear.

The Apostle John, following his vision of the Judgment Day, is given a glimpse of Heaven. He tells us what he saw: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea”—Revelation 21, verse 1. The old heaven and earth was the universe which we now inhabit. It has many beautiful spots, mountains, forests, lakes, beaches, gardens. We have happy memories of delightful places where we have been in the past. There are also thorns and thistles, diseases and plagues, storms and disasters, wars and famines. But Heaven is a new world, where everything is beautiful, healthy, full of life, and very good. John tells us how he saw Heaven descending to earth: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”—Revelation 21, verse 2.

Some have argued that the present universe will pass out of existence, and Heaven will be totally new and unconnected. This, however, seems unlikely. God created a beautiful and wonderful world in the beginning, and Satan destroyed it. It’s certain that Satan will not have the ultimate victory. When the ancient world came under God’s judgment, it was destroyed with a flood, and a purified world arose from under the flood waters. The present world will be destroyed with fire: “But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”—2 Peter 3, verse 7. Peter adds: “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”—verses 10–12. From this massive conflagration, a new heavens and a new earth will emerge. But the new will have a continuity with the old. Just as the body of the saint is buried in the earth a natural and corruptible body, but rises from the grave with a perfect body fitted for eternity, so it will be with the new earth. Paul describes this as the restitution of all things: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”—Romans 8:22–23. The world around us is pictured as writhing in agony because of the curse which sin brought upon it. Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes show the world in pain. It is personified as longing for redemption. One day, the heavens and the earth which are now will be regenerated, re-created, and the new heavens and the new earth will appear. This will take place alongside the resurrection of the saints, their bodies redeemed, and their status as the adopted children of God demonstrated. Heaven will be a restored and improved Garden of Eden,

where sin and Satan shall never again enter to destroy.

John describes the special presence of God enjoyed by those who are saved: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”—Revelation 21, verse 3. In a very real sense, God’s presence was with Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night led them. God’s presence was in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, and then later, in the temple, sitting on the mercy seat sitting above the ark of the covenant. But from time to time, he was grieved with the sin of Israel and withdrew. Also, there was the veil of the tabernacle which separated even the priests from God. But in the New Testament, God will pitch his tent among his people, and the veil has been torn down. The saints will have constant and enjoyable access to God. Moses pleaded with God, “Let me see thy glory.” God placed him in a cleft of the rock, and as it were, placed his hand over him and then passed by, and Moses was able to see the back parts of God. But God is a spirit and has no body. Yet something of the glory of God was revealed to Moses. Paul explains the future knowledge of God’s people: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”—1 Corinthians 13, verse 12. John, in his epistle, asserts: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”—1 John 3, verse 2. One day, we shall see God, and be transformed into his likeness, and not just get a glimpse, but fill our eyes and our hearts with the beatific vision.

Every human being, as someone said, has a God-shaped hole in their heart. As Augustine put it: “Thou has made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee.” We need God, we seek God, and in Heaven, we fully find him. God makes a great promise to those who reach Heaven: “They shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”—Revelation 21, verse 3. God, of course, has already made his covenant with us, and entered into a huge commitment. He has already revealed himself to us, and we have, by grace, embraced him. He is our God and undertakes everything that God can do for us. We commit ourselves to him, trusting him, and giving our hearts and our lives to him. However, in Heaven, we will fully, and forever, experience God. In this world, we sometimes grow spiritually cold. We backslide, and are caught up by the cares and pleasures of the world. And because of this, God, in his divine displeasure, chastises us by removing from us his felt presence. But in Heaven, we dwell in his presence forever. No sin can disturb our relationship with him, and we are fully satisfied with him.

Now thinking of the New Jerusalem. Sometimes Heaven is described as a city—the New Jerusalem. It’s not a lonely or a desolate place. This life is often a waste howling wilderness. But that is behind us. There are many lonely people in this world. Sometimes God’s people can be neglected in this world, particularly those who are chronically ill, or elderly, and are confined to their homes. But all who get to Heaven will have company, the very best of company there. It is a city inhabited by millions from every tribe and nation. It is God’s house of many mansions, or many homes. We are going home to be with our Father and the family. Other times, Heaven is described as a garden: “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations”—Revelation 22, verse 1–2. It is the new Eden. A paradise garden of trees and flowers, and a river running through it with crystal clear water. This river of the water of life proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb. God is the

source and sovereign Planner of our lives, and that of all men and women. And because the river is also expressed as flowing from the throne of the Lamb, we can see that the eternal life we enjoy has been earned for us by Christ through his atoning death on the cross. From the throne of the loving God and the suffering Savior, the Spirit flows to us as the life-giving, refreshing water. The Spirit beautifies the garden, and fills the children of God with eternal life. Just as in Eden there was a tree of life, so here, Christ is to us the tree of life. God's people have unrestricted access to its nourishing and varied fruits, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Christ is, of course, the very center of Paradise, and it is his presence that makes Heaven, heaven to his people: "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water"—Revelation 7, verse 17.

Another aspect of Heaven is that there's no suffering. In this life, there is much pain and suffering. But in Heaven, we're told: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"—Revelation 21, verse 4. This life can be described as a veil of tears. We enter it with a cry, and often leave it with a cry. There are tears due to physical pain, to psychological pain, to the unkindness of those around us, tears due to grief, and to bereavement. But in Heaven, God wipes away all tears. Many tears are shed in sorrow over sin, but now all our sins are washed away, and we will never sin again, and so joyfully, we sing: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood"—Revelation 1, verse 5.

There will be no more death. This is a huge part of the curse which came on mankind because of sin: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"—Genesis 3:19. The aging process began when Adam sinned. Man was subjected to all kinds of horrible illnesses and diseases. In the ancient world, leprosy was dreaded; today, it is cancer. But in Heaven, there is no illness, no weakness, no disability. All which in this world leads to death has been removed. There will be no more pain. What a wonderful truth that is. Some godly people know much pain and weakness in this life, and struggle long with disability. Many know the terrible pain of mental illness, the darkness of depression and anxiety. These former things are now passed away, and there shall be no more curse—Revelation 21, verse 4.

One of the things God's children look forward to most about Heaven is the end of sinning. We hate sin, and sin brings so much misery to us. But we're told: "His servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads"—Revelation 22, verse 3–4. Because we love God, we hate sin. We are constantly battling against temptation, against the world, the flesh, and the devil. When we are converted, we die to sin as our master. It no longer has dominion over us—Romans 6:14, but it is still constantly troubling us. As long as we are in this world, sin, sadly, is so easy. We are troubled with anger, lust, covetousness, hypocrisy, pride, idols. Cares and pleasures readily become gods to us. We long to be perfectly holy and pleasing to God, and it's wonderful to look forward to a Heaven where God is on the throne in our hearts, and self is completely subordinate to our Lord.

Thankfully, in Heaven, there is no devil. Satan and his demons will be locked up in the bottomless pit. The ungodly world will also be cast into Hell. The flesh will not enter Heaven. Nothing unclean will be there. How hard it is for us today to control our sinful thoughts and lusts, but in Heaven, that will be a thing of the past. Our heart's desire is to worship God without distraction, and to serve him without pride intruding. We long to be like him, and one day soon, we will be so like him, that we will have his name on our foreheads.

No night there. We are told in Revelation 22, verse 5 that there shall be no night there. There

will be no darkness in Heaven, and no works of darkness: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all”—1 John 1:5. There will be no sun or moon—there is no need for such: “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it”—Revelation 21, verses 23–24. Hell is the outer darkness, and “the blackness of darkness forever”—Jude 13. But Heaven is full of light. Night is the time of tiredness, but there will be no weariness or exhaustion in Heaven. Night is the time when thieves and robbers do their work, but there will be no criminals in Heaven. Wild animals hunt in the darkness, but in Heaven, there will be nothing to frighten. Night is the time of fear, but there will be no fear in Heaven. The prince of darkness delights in attacking in the night, disturbing our sleep, bringing waves of anxiety, but there will be no night there. Nights can, from time to time, be times of weeping, “but joy cometh in the morning”—Psalm 30, verse 5. Heaven will be one everlasting morning of joy.

No more sea. The Apostle John states: “There shall be no more sea”—Revelation 21, verse 1. This is initially surprising to us. Many of us enjoy going to the seaside, viewing the cliffs, the rocks, the sandy beaches. We love to sail on the sea, to fish in the sea, to see it’s great beauty, whether it’s calm or stormy. But for John, the sea meant something different—the sea meant imprisonment. He tells us that he was on the Island of Patmos as a prisoner: “For the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”—Revelation 1, verse 9. He would stand on the shore of the island, his island prison, and look across to the mainland, towards his beloved Ephesus, and think of his Christian brothers and sisters, and long to have fellowship with them, and to be ministering to them, but the sea separated him from the church. He looked forward to the day when there would be no more sea, no more separation from fellow Christians, but unity and fellowship forevermore. Others, as they look at the sea, they think of loved ones lost in storms. The Apostle Paul himself suffered shipwreck at least four times. On one occasion, he spent a night and a day in the deep—2 Corinthians 11:25. And after writing that epistle, he suffered another shipwreck, after a terrifying storm, and in answer to prayer, he landed on Malta. How many young lives have been lost at sea? But the sea shall give up the dead which are in it—Revelation 20:13. And now there shall be no more sea.

The glory of the city. In Revelation 21, there is a lengthy description of the city, the New Jerusalem. It is a great city—Revelation 21, verse 10, and that is required to house the enumerable crowds saved by the blood of Christ. Abraham was assured that his children would be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand by the seashore for multitude. A great city. It’s also a holy city—verse 10. Nothing sinful will enter Heaven: “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life”—Revelation 21, verse 27. It is further said that outside are “dogs, and sorcerers and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie”—Revelation 22, verse 15. The only ones to enter Heaven are those who are washed in the blood of Christ, justified, and sanctified: “These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat”—Revelation 7, verses 14 to 16. The New Jerusalem has the glory of God, and symbolically, it is “like a precious jasper stone, clear as crystal”—Revelation 21, verse 11. Heaven is made up of jewels. The gates are of pearls, and the streets of gold. We are told that it is

made up of the most precious things that we now know. Gold, for which many sell their souls, is as common as the dust under our feet in Heaven. The wall is great and high, because it is a great city. There are twelve gates facing in all directions. These gates are open, welcoming all who would receive the gospel and come. But the gospel must be accepted in this life, because “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment”—Hebrews 9:27. Once death comes, there’s no second chance. Death is immediately followed by judgment.

The walls of the city have twelve foundations, in which are written the names of the twelve apostles. The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”—Ephesians 2:20. The apostles had a vitally important role in organizing the church, and in revealing the truth. The perfection of the city is further emphasized in that it is a cube. The length, the breadth, and the height of it being equal. The length, and the breadth, and the height are twelve thousand furlongs. The number twelve is significant. It is three times four—three for the Trinity, and four for the four corners of the earth. Multiplied by a thousand, which emphasizes its greatness. So we have here the Trinity working for the salvation of the earth. The different foundations are of different precious stones, and so truly magnificent.

Then we’re told that there was no temple there. Temples and churches are very important to God’s people in this world, so we’re surprised by the fact that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem. But what we must remember is that it is all a temple. Many compare the Garden of Eden to a temple, but how much more will Heaven be a temple. The throne of God and of the Lamb is central. All of the inhabitants are pictured surrounding the throne. We think of John’s first vision into Heaven: “Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold”—Revelation 4, verses 2–4. The twenty-four elders represents the church of the Old Testament, and the church of the New Testament. Then we are told of the worship: “The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”—verse 10–11. “The four living creatures that were before the throne rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”—verse 8. The glory of the nations is prostrated at the feet of King Jesus: “And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it”—Revelation 21, verse 26.

Sometimes the question is asked, Will we know one another in Heaven? It would seem very strange if we did not. Surely, we will not be more ignorant than we are now. When Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, they did not require an introduction for the disciples to tell who they were. The rich man looking up to Heaven, recognized father Abraham. However, Jesus makes plain that family relationships will not exist as they are on earth. The Sadducees asked him concerning a woman who had, in turn, seven brothers as her husband. Whose wife would she be in heaven? Jesus states clearly that the Sadducees err, not knowing the Scripture: “For in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels, but are as the angels of God in heaven”—Matthew 22, verse 30. There will be no family groups, neither will there be special parties or cliques or denominations in Heaven. All will be the children of God, and all will be united in perfect love one for another.

How then would we view our loved ones in Hell? This is a question which perplexes many.

The thought of a child, or a spouse, or a parent, a sibling, or a friend ending up in Hell is hard for us to accept. We love our friends and family and hate to see them suffering. Would the lostness of someone precious to us spoil our Heaven? What we must realize is that nothing will spoil Heaven. The Judgment Day will demonstrate the wickedness of the wicked, and the justice of God. In this life, we have little understanding of the evil of sin, and particularly, how wrong it is to reject or even to ignore the call of the gospel. Christ suffered immense pain to save us, and offers salvation to us all. To reject Christ and, as it were, to trample his blood underfoot deserves great punishment. Our love being first and foremost to God, will mean we will acquiesce fully in his Judgment.

A further question, what will our occupation be in Heaven? Some think that our occupations will be similar to what they are in this life, but without sin. We cannot be sure of these things. Certainly, we will be praising and giving thanks to God. Will we get bored? Definitely not. God knows what is best, and he will decide in Heaven what suits his people and makes them completely happy. Central will be the worship of God. Just as in Hell, the punishments vary according to privileges and sins, so the rewards in Heaven will vary according to faithfulness, love to the Savior, diligence in labors for the Master, and holiness of life here, but all will be fully satisfied. God is infinitely great, and so, he will be a central part of Heaven, and our occupation will be more and more discovering God, understanding God, seeing God, studying him, and as we study him, praising him accordingly.

Heaven is described as the marriage supper of the Lamb. The bride has made herself ready, and “she shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace”—Psalm 45, verses 14–15. The garment of needlework is the holiness of the saints. The church will forever be married to Christ, and enjoy his company to all of eternity. “For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”—Revelation 7, verse 17. It will be a feast of love for Christ forever. Amen.