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**CHRIST SUPREME:**  
*The Approximation*  
**of Christian Hope**

**Recover a Vision Shaped  
by the FULLNESS of His Supremacy**

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Over one hundred national prayer leaders gathered in Washington, D.C., the eve of the 1986 National Day of Prayer. On a warm May night we huddled in a church sanctuary to spend a season of prayer seeking God for spiritual awakening throughout America.

To begin our convocation then-Chaplain of the U.S. Senate Dr. Richard Halverson spoke to us for nearly an hour. He challenged us to re-examine our agenda in prayer for the evening. He pressed us with one major question: “How many of you are praying regularly for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ?” Not a single hand went up.

Gently he rebuked us: “If you pray for revival in our nation but don’t pray for the Second Coming of the Lord, I must seriously question the legitimacy of your revival prayers.” The audience sat in stunned silence. So he continued. “This is because, in a profound way, every revival involves a

*coming* of Christ to His Church. In revival, as Scripture frequently documents, God shows up among His people to reveal to them more of His power and glory. In the final analysis *that's* what revives them.

“Now I wonder ... ” he said as he paused to survey us over his wire-rimmed glasses. “How can we ask for God to fill us with a fresh sense of Christ’s presence in revival and not, in the same breath, intercede just as earnestly for Christ’s Kingdom to be manifested in its totality before the entire universe?”

He concluded his exhortation sounding this caution: “Only those who are regularly praying and looking for the *ultimate* Day of Glory will ever be able to sustain the necessary hope and resolve to keep praying for Christ to be glorified *today* by anything like a national revival.”

The next morning as we met on Capitol Hill to intercede for America, I can assure you our requests took a decidedly new — and bolder — direction.

This respected Christian statesman had called us back to another awesome truth about the supremacy of Christ: He is not only the *summation* and *consummation* of Christian hope, but He is also the source of profound *approximations* of that hope poured out on His Church every day, in a host of ways this chapter will uncover. Among those blessings is one we sometimes call a “spiritual awakening”. Whether with a congregation or a whole nation, every God-given revival is a *foretaste* of the “Final Revival”, the one awaiting us at the very moment Christ openly returns to reign.

Halverson’s perspective on prayer reminded me of other stirring words from the pen of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish reformer, Samuel Rutherford. After years of persecution and imprisonment for preaching Christ’s supremacy, he wrote from a jail cell that he still found it necessary to pray one major request for himself every day: “*Lord Jesus, come and conquer me!*” What did he mean by this?

Throughout his lifelong mission Rutherford knew one thing remained necessary for him to survive and thrive: He had to experience personal renewal in a manner similar to how Christ’s kingship would one day renew all things. The magnitude of sacrifices this cleric had to make for his Scottish people demanded that Christ’s supremacy constantly dominate his life. The reformer needed to be subdued daily to Christ Himself — conquered, as he put it — in a manner reflective of how His Lord would conquer the universe at the Resurrection, the Day when Rutherford’s own ministry would finally reach its Grand and Glorious Conclusion.

Similar approximations await all who follow our Sovereign Savior. Rutherford's prayer must be answered for every believer. That experience should become a way of life! Paul models this when he writes: "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.... and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.... I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.... Straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.... And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies...." (Phil. 3).

Understanding what these approximations look like provides Christian discipleship its most dramatic dimensions. It also improves our ability to confront and cure any crisis of supremacy. It can empower us, like it did Rutherford's reformation movement, to carry out a Campaign of Hope for our own generation. So, let's investigate how Christ activates within His Church approximations of the Final Displays of His supremacy. These include:

- **A New Creation: The approximation of the consummate decree.**
- **The Holy Spirit: The approximation of the consummate life.**
- **The Church: The approximation of the consummate community.**
- **World Mission: The approximation of the consummate triumph.**
- **Revival: The approximation of the consummate awakening.**
- **Spiritual Warfare: The approximation of the consummate battle.**

We'll conclude the survey by looking at some ways His ultimate glory could transform the street where you live *today*.

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## The FULLNESS of His Supremacy

(*Malachi 3:1-5, 16 - 4:3*)

What's it like to spend an hour bird-watching with binoculars in hand? High-powered lenses allow an often unexplored world to open up magically. A blazing red cardinal sitting on top of a tall oak can seem so near to you.

You feel as though you could reach out and touch it. Binoculars allow you to watch its every move, even the ruffling of its feathers as it warbles its distinctive song. Though perched on the tip of a tree, the bird seems to be right on the branch next to you.

In the same sense, in our union with Christ we inherit more than just *future* ages of unceasing blessings. Like professional field glasses, Christ brings that future *near* to us. He magnifies it for us as He dwells among us. By virtue of who He is as Lord, He makes even our ultimate destiny — the Consummation — very *present* to us. By walking with Him daily we can experience the eternal dynamics of a Kingdom that is not yet fulfilled. Not only does God’s Son grant us eternal life after death, but He also brings us into eternal life *before* death (Jn. 17:3). There’s a *fullness* in Christ’s reign meant for God’s people to experience every day we breathe — a fullness derived from a supremacy that will transform everything on the Last Day.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **Why should Christ’s supremacy feel like the future invading the present?**

Have you ever had this happen to you? You’re involved in a deeply meaningful time of prayer. Suddenly your heart swells with confidence about the results. It seems like God is about to act any moment. You “feel” as if the answers are already in hand. It’s as good as done, you think! What triggers this unique experience? Here’s what I think: The presence of Christ, tangibly touching us in a prayer meeting, reassures us that who He is, at the End of All Things, *is* the answer to all our prayers. As we draw near to Jesus in prayer we experience His promise: “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it *will* be yours” (Mk. 11). The Spirit’s witness of the glorious greatness of God’s Son reassures us that, whether now or later, our prayers will be answered in such a way that there will be no disappointment with the outcome.

To be sure, *quantitatively* speaking we can never receive the full measure of answered prayers. That requires the Consummation. *Qualitatively* speaking, however, God intends for the Consummation to be a part of our daily walk with Christ, both in our prayers as well as in every other facet of discipleship. The glory of the Age-to-Come resides in Him. He resides in us. Therefore, all we could ever hope for is already *Christologically* near, we might say, even if *chronologically* it may not yet

be near. In principle then, as Lord of all Christ makes Eternity *accessible* to us every moment.

That's why I like the phrase "approximations of the Consummation". Our Lord wants to give us foretastes of greater things ahead. He is (in the words of Steve Hawthorne) both *present* and *presiding* as King among His people right now. He is ready to share the *fullness* of His lordship with us right now.

We must never forget within every congregation on planet earth of 20 members or 20,000: The Lord Jesus is fully there. Not just a part of Him but ALL of Him. And He is supremely able, willing and ready to show us new facets of His reign each day. Therefore, just as He alone must culminate all of God's promises at the End, even so He alone can (and will) give us multiple *intermediate* experiences of those promises now.

Of course, approximations are still only that — *approximations*. They are not the ultimate reality for which we wait. Nor can foretastes of Eternity be compared with the glory that shall be revealed when Christ returns (Rom. 8 and 1 Jn. 3). Still, again and again God is willing to invade His frail, fickle, frequently frustrated people to re-awaken them once more to their destiny. He wants to unleash in us fresh works of Christ's Kingdom in a manner reflective of what, before long, His Everlasting Reign will unveil.

St. Catherine of Siena said it well: "All the way to heaven is heaven!" No matter how one interprets Biblical references to the Millennium (Christ's 1000-year reign as described in Rev. 20), we can all agree with this: To significant degrees an echo of Millennium-type blessings should resound within hearts and churches, here and now, because the Master of the Millennium dwells within us here and now. Scripture encourages us to sustain an attitude of constant watchfulness — not just for the Consummation but for approximations of the Consummation. Daily we are invited to anticipate increasing evidences of

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#### QUOTABLE QUOTE

**Martha said, "Master, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask God he will give you." Jesus said, "Your brother will be raised up.... You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Master, all along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world."**

(JOHN 11 — THE MESSAGE)

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Christ's supremacy among us. Daily we may look for His rule above to enrich our routines below. Daily we may expect to receive *fullness* of life from His Throne, drawing upon the quality of existence that will soon be ours when we are "revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3). What could be more exciting than this? As we saw in chapter 3, the One who dwells among us is Himself the "presence of that future". He is our "preview of coming attractions".

As a major step toward confronting and curing the crisis of supremacy then, let's dig into six key approximations each of which magnifies the fullness of Christ's reign in the Church today. Each is also a foretaste of the Day when all promises are consummated in Him as Lord.

## I. A New Creation: Approximations of the Consummate *Decree*

*(Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7)*

It's a curious thing. Throughout the book of Revelation each one of God's decisive judgments explodes onto the world scene amid hymns, doxologies and acts of worship. Singing and supremacy surface together. Believers, however, are invited into similar celebrations *every day*. That's because in union with the Son we have already passed through the Final Judgment. Already we stand victorious on the other side of His Reign of Fire. How did this happen?

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **How has God applied the future to our relationship with Christ today?**

Despite the dramatic increase in life expectancy over the past one hundred years, no one has yet made claims to immortality — except One. Nonetheless, people in every culture continue to seek it. Some have their bodies frozen at death, ready to be reactivated when a cure for mortality is found. Others grasp for a place in eternity through mystical convergences with a Higher Power.

But to Christians Romans 5 declares that "just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness, to bring eternal life, through

Jesus Christ our Lord” (vs. 20-21), meaning that even in this world believers are declared “immortal” and called to live like it! Throughout the New Testament Christians are identified as those currently dead, alive and ascended with Christ (Rom. 6; Eph. 2; Col. 3). It is as if we were already transported to the time of the Consummation, strolling through the New Jerusalem.

Something unusual has happened. It has to do with the *positioning* of believers before the Consummation. Surrendered to our Sovereign, entering into an intimate union with Him, we have a solidarity with Him that replaces forever our identity with fallen Adam and his race. The Old Creation has been disqualified. God decrees we now have an exclusive identity with His Son, allowing the Father to label us as His *new creation* (Rom. 5 and 2 Cor. 5).

Christians aren’t simply on a road to “the sweet by-and-by”. Instead, the Bible invites Christians to *reckon* themselves ascended into Heaven, serving Christ in the power of His Spirit as re-created beings. God invites us to *act as if* we currently stand on the other side of Judgment Day. Jesus assured believers they will never come into judgment because they have already passed from death to life (Jn. 5 with 1 Jn. 3).

The moment I was born again (as a freshman in college) God decreed me to be eternally alive. *Christ’s* future has become *my* future. The Father was free, in His justice, to treat me as if I were already raised and reigning in the Consummation. This was His *consummate decree*. As far as He was concerned, from that moment (and even long before that moment) I was not only foreknown, called and justified, but also glorified (Rom. 8). All of it was as good as done.

If I may borrow Luther’s words: God created a “happy exchange”. This placed me, in His eyes, within the Consummation drama as *if* it was unfolding here and now. This exchange transpired when Christ took upon Himself who I was in my sin and bestowed on me who He is in His righteousness. In response to the Gospel I was united to Christ by faith as both Savior and final Judge-of-all. Heaven’s Supreme Court decreed that everything Christ is and has — as well as everything He experienced by His own death, burial,

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QUOTABLE QUOTE

**He picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.... It’s God’s gift from start to finish!**

(EPHESIANS 2 — THE MESSAGE)

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resurrection and ascension — was now transferred to me. From that hour the Father has treated me *as if* Christ is me and I am Christ.

Separated from Him eternally, dead to God in my sin, at one time I faced no other prospect but dreadful wrath. It rendered me hopeless. Only if *someone else* could bring me alive from the dead setting me free from the charges against me, could I ever hope to see my precarious condition reversed. No religion, no philosophy, no moral resolutions of my own could ever avail.

Then one day the Gospel came. I believed. Immediately from God's perspective I was raised with His Son from the dead. My destination became identical with His. God reckoned me to be crucified two thousand years ago with Jesus, at the very time He bore the judgment for my sin (and for all sin) on Calvary. The judgment my Lord experienced became *my* primary judgment, too.

Since I am permanently abiding in Him (Jn. 15), I can be disqualified only if Christ Himself could ever be disqualified from full participation in the Age-to-Come (which will never happen). There is no future judgment that will ever expel me from the glories of the New Jerusalem. In the most profound sense, my “day in court” has passed. The Cross was it. The Cross was final. The Cross put behind me the life-threatening consequences of my incalculable rebellions against the Almighty One.

Long before a New Heaven and Earth ever takes center stage, God has already decreed that I may walk before Him *as if* I were Christ Himself, and thus *as if* I were a fully resurrected inhabitant of eternity. Therefore, at no time should I ever be surprised that my life in Christ incorporates many other kinds of “approximations” of the impending Regeneration of the universe. Such foretastes may be preliminary, but they are substantial. They create genuine experiences of what it will be like when His supremacy has final sway.

Space will not allow us to explore key doctrines emphasized in Scripture (and by Christian theologians of all persuasions) that describe various dimensions of participation in this consummate decree of God.

Maybe you've heard some of the concepts, such as:

- Justification
- Propitiation
- Acquittal
- Remission
- Reconciliation
- Forgiveness
- Redemption
- Adoption

Lumped together, these terms constitute two great realities about our hope in Christ. They speak about our *destiny* in Christ. They speak about our *identity* in Christ. Consider:

*Destiny* refers to our future. One day soon we will stand vindicated with absolute confidence before a just and holy God. When the Consummation breaks upon us, we will face it unafraid, alive with every promise in Jesus, because *our* final judgment climaxed at the Cross long ago (Jude 1). That's our destination under His consummate decree. This is one expression of Christ's supremacy in our lives.

*Identity*, on the other hand, has to do with our current status before God's Throne. As we've just seen, believers can live as if the Day of Judgment had come and gone. Our sins have not simply been disregarded for the moment. They have been permanently eliminated by the blood of Jesus. God's wrath for us fell on Him instead. Because we abide in Him, from the moment of salvation forward God decrees us newly created. We provide a preview of how He will renovate creation at the Second Coming (Rev. 21). Now, all *we* need to do is take the initiative to reckon (decree) for ourselves what God proclaims (decrees) about us (Rom. 6). This, too, expresses how Christ's supremacy touches us everyday.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **What does the word "justification" tell us about the fullness of Christ's supremacy?**

Let's use one of the more technical words listed above, *justification*, as one example. Theologians call justification a "forensic" work of God. This means that by divine *decree* (as described in His Word) God has thrust His decisions about our final fate into the present. He declares Himself fully satisfied with who we are in Jesus. He accepts us point blank as His own children.

Biblically speaking, the idea of being justified has always included the sense that God treats me "*just as if I'd*" [justified] already entered into the Consummation. To my utter amazement, Scripture teaches that the Father declares I have an intimate relationship with Him, right now, that mirrors what His eternal Son has enjoyed with Him from ages past and will enjoy for ages to come. This moment, He assures me unlimited, unhindered access into everything Christ has for me. On more than one level I can start enjoying many blessings of the Kingdom-That-Waits-To-Appear.

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 QUOTABLE QUOTE

**In the same way that the Father raises the dead and creates life, so does the Son. The Son gives life to anyone he chooses. Neither he nor the Father shuts anyone out. The Father hands all authority to judge over to the Son so that the Son will be honored equally with the Father. Anyone here who believes what I'm saying right now and aligns himself with the Father, and has in fact put me in charge, has at this very moment the real, lasting light and is no longer condemned to be an outsider. This person has taken a giant step from the world of the dead to the world of the living. It's urgent that you get this right: The time has arrived — I mean right now! — when dead men and women will hear the voice of the Son of God and hearing, will come to life.**

(JOHN 5 — THE MESSAGE)

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As Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians 1, we are not simply made wise or righteous or holy through Christ. Rather, Christ has been made *for us* all the wisdom, and righteousness, and holiness we will ever need. That means we do not just take His *help* for where we have failed. Rather, we take *Him* and all that He brings with Him. He encompasses the everlasting favor of God toward us. In Him the Father forgives our sins, sets aside His wrath and treats us brand new.

So it follows: *Justified*, I can rightfully claim to be liberated from all fear toward the Righteous Sovereign, released to start life all over again before His face. *Justified*, I can act as if there never was a reason for His holy fury, at least where I'm concerned. *Justified*, I am as fully vindicated as Christ was the day God raised Him from the dead. *Justified*, I remain accepted before the Judge of the universe forever because of my unassailable union with the Judge's Son — with Who He is and with all He inherits. *Justified*, I've become partaker of His holy nature (2 Pet. 1). This includes being incorporated into a people born again by His Spirit (Jn. 3). All of this is an *approximation* of the Consummation.

When the Last Day finally arrives with unquenchable fire for unrepentant sinners, it will be discovered that long ago Christians passed through the same examination. It happened when by faith we were decreed to have been crucified and buried with Christ, and then raised and ascended with Him. Our life in coming ages

will essentially be the same life God invites believers to share in right now. At both points in time *the sum total of existence takes its cue from the person of our Savior, supremely sufficient for all the saints, "world without end"*. With Him as my hope the Father treats me "just as if I'd" exited the tomb and was currently walking the streets of gold! Talk about experiencing

the fullness of His supremacy!

Oxford University theologian and author Alister McGrath puts it concisely for us when he concludes: “Justification language appears in Paul with reference to both the inauguration of the life of faith and also its final consummation. It anticipates the verdict of the final judgment, declaring in advance the verdict of ultimate acquittal. The believer’s present justified experience is thus an anticipation, an advance participation of deliverance from the wrath to come, and an *assurance* in the present of the final eschatological verdict of acquittal” (Rom. 5:9-10).

That’s a mouthful! But it deserves careful reflection. Are you a follower of Jesus? Is your hope in Him based on His supremacy over all things? Then McGrath is talking about *you*. He’s describing one facet of the fullness of life that Christ’s reign guarantees to you *today*.

## 2. The Holy Spirit: Approximations of the Consummate *Life* (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5)

In his *New York Times* best-seller *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* Eckhart Tolle laid out for his readers a Zen-style message on achieving happiness. It comes about, he claims, by how one chooses to focus on the present, and only on the present. “In *The Now*, in the absence of time, all your problems dissolve,” he wrote in a book that sold over a million copies. Claiming one can free oneself from the mind, and thus from one’s most persistent fears, he offers his personal pilgrimage as proof, reviewing how he had used his “Now Therapy” to escape suicidal depression and achieve a breakthrough into what he called soul-centered bliss.

I’m pleased to announce that the Lord Jesus Christ offers a much more potent antidote to anxiety and despair! He provides the “power of *hope*”, which means the power of the *future* brought into the “now”. Biblically speaking, this distills down to the power of a *Person* who dwells within a Christian’s very being: the Holy Spirit. The contrast between the ways of guru Tolle and the Spirit of God could not be greater.

**THINK WITH ME ...****In what sense does the Spirit provide us the power of the future?**

As Scripture teaches, the Holy Spirit unites us with our Sovereign (an intimacy without parallel — 1 Cor. 6), enabling us to take up residence within the totality of who Jesus is. Next He awakens our souls to more of the unsearchable riches found in Christ (Eph. 3), drawing us to embrace Him and enjoy Him wholeheartedly (Rom. 8). In fact, the greatest gift God's Spirit may impart to any believer is simply His sharing with us more of the Son and then teaching us how to receive Him better. He also sets our hearts aflame with Jesus' love for His people and for nations (Rom. 5), all of which flows out of our walking in the Spirit under the lordship of Jesus (Col. 2 with Gal. 6).

But that's not the finish. He also implants in us hope about greater things to come (Rom. 15). Just as the End can never be defined adequately apart from understanding the role of the third person of the Trinity, neither can the Spirit's mission in our lives right now be grasped without reference to the End. By the Spirit, the Father raised His Son from the dead and exalted Him on High (Rom. 8). By the Spirit, the Father sustains and spreads the impact of the Son's supremacy to the ends of the earth, to the end of time (Rev. 1, 4). By the Spirit, the Son activates His rule in the midst of the Church in ways that echo how He will do it for all ages to come (Acts 4-5). By the Spirit, God will faithfully deliver on every blessing promised to the heirs of eternal life (Acts 1, 2). The Spirit will be the Chief Architect — as well as the Defining Characteristic — of our very existence in the Age-to-Come. Even our resurrection bodies are called "spiritual bodies" in 1 Corinthians 15, meaning our whole being (body, soul, spirit) will eventually be animated and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

It should come as no surprise, then, that our life in Jesus right now is also defined Biblically as "life in the Spirit" (Rom. 8). The Holy Spirit "super-naturalizes" every aspect of our existence as Christians, doing so in ways that approximate how He will influence the entire universe when Christ returns.

When Scripture calls the physical body of a believer the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6), is there not the hint of something grand at work? Even before He reconstitutes Creation into a temple for the Lamb (Rev. 5, 21-22), the Spirit desires to make my piece of that universe — including my mortal dwelling — a "scale model" of what the finished product will look

like. He wants to approximate the eternal Holy of Holies wherever *I* am standing at this very moment. What a witness to Jesus as Lord!

In addition, the Bible describes the Spirit as the Father's deposit (or down payment). This guarantees that all He has promised about our future with His Son — which we're sampling even now — will come to pass in glory — beyond a doubt. Dwelling within my being, the Spirit is the pledge or firstfruits of the full inheritance stored up for me in Heaven (Eph. 1; 2 Cor. 1). He puts Eternity into my heart and then walks me victoriously right into it.

No wonder Biblical word pictures for the Consummation find parallels in what we're taught about the Spirit's ministry to believers today. Jesus set the example when He chose the prophecy about the Spirit's End-Time ministry in Isaiah 61 to be His inaugural address in Nazareth (Lk. 4). That morning before the synagogue He claimed to fulfill the text that read "the Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me..." Every promise made in Isaiah actually foreshadowed the blessings of the Eternal Kingdom He had come to secure (as the whole 61<sup>st</sup> chapter teaches):

- The anointing Spirit matches our poverty with God's riches.
- He sets free the spiritual captives among God's people.
- He confronts every kind of bondage to sin that cripples us.
- The Spirit opens our eyes to see more clearly God's glory.
- He lavishes upon us God's grace and peace in all circumstances.
- He opens up within us fountains of praise to God.

Now all of this stood among them because Jesus, full of the Spirit, stood among them. Ahead of the Climax, God's Anointing brought the fullness of the Son within reach of everyone that day.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **How does the filling of the Spirit connect us with Christ's supremacy?**

To be *filled* with the Spirit (Eph. 5), therefore, means that everything Christ is and offers dwells in us right now — not in reduced supply but in all of its *fullness* (Eph. 3). So much so that the Spirit's indwelling presence can be boiled down to one phrase: "*Christ* in you" (Rom. 8 and Col. 1). Even in the darkest moments the Spirit is powerfully at work unleashing fresh expres-

sions of the bounty of God's promises to us in Jesus. The Church has not received "half" a Savior. Wherever the Spirit abides, ALL of Jesus abides.

Of course, at times we do not see His fullness manifested in every believer, or in every congregation — at least not the way we would like. But if we seek Him, remain open to Him, stay alert to His presence and remain ready to receive His work among us; if we offer ourselves daily to Him to live at the center of who Christ is, where Christ is headed, what Christ imparts and how Christ is blessed, then the Spirit will make the Kingdom our theme. He will pour into us greater measures of Christ's fullness than we ever dared to dream possible (Eph. 3).

Maybe a few metaphors would help to clarify this connection. The Spirit is like an *alarm clock*, awakening us to Christ and fuller dimensions of His supremacy. He's like a pair of *eyeglasses*, enabling us to see Christ more clearly for who He really is. Again, He is like a *cell phone*, keeping us in constant communication with the Lord of life.

He serves us like a *fan belt* serves a car! He brings the future within our reach, in a way reminiscent of how the belt links up the radiator fan with the engine, bringing the power of internal combustion to bear on six little blades. To use another car metaphor: Less like fog lights that help navigate dark, bumpy roads, the Spirit is more like a *sunrise*, casting rays of everlasting glory all over us right now, enabling us to boldly travel into the full daylight of God's Kingdom purposes.

Here's one other picture: The Holy Spirit provides more than just a stunning *playbill*, describing for us the plot of future productions and revealing things to come (Jn. 16 with Rev. 1). In addition, He transforms daily obedience to Christ into active roles in Kingdom dramas that involve us in *dress rehearsals* foreshadowing the Final Episode. You might see such rehearsals played out, for example, when a Christian congressman fights for tax relief for the poor, or when a Christian high school student tries to keep sexually pure in the face of intense peer pressure, or when a missionary in India helps a Hindu renounce idolatry to embrace Jesus as Lord.

With whatever metaphor I choose one ultimate truth stands out: The Spirit unites me with Christ in a way that is *qualitatively* the way I can expect to abide in Him forever. The Spirit does not simply engrave God's promises on my heart; instead, He engraves on my heart the *Promise-giver* Himself! He wants me to remain consumed with Christ as my one great passion. He is at work to deposit in me a faith in Jesus that stirs me

regularly to seek the benefits His reign produces. (Such insights leap from Jesus' upper room teaching on the ministry of the Holy Spirit — see Jn. 14 and 16.)

From Pentecost forward the Spirit has continued His work of introducing believers to “the powers of the age to come” (Heb. 6), causing those powers to operate within us in ways reflective of Jesus' own extraordinary earthly ministry (Heb. 2). Just as the miracles of Jesus were signs to His audience of what God would grant them at the Culmination of History, so those same powers function in believers today as precursors of the same destiny.

Physical miracles might be viewed also as *symbols* of the radical transformation promised for all creation when Jesus comes back. Healings (whenever God chooses to grant them) provide us *samplings*, if you will, of the Day all things will be delivered from their bondage to decay (Rom. 8). The Spirit uses miracles to *advertise* the Consummation and keep our hearts yearning for the fullness of our Savior's reign. Heaven's temporal signs and wonders are meant to provide the Church *appetizers*, making us hungry for even more of Christ's glory up ahead.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **How does the Spirit consecrate us for Christ's reign, both present and future?**

Despite His diverse ministries, the most comprehensive name Scripture gives Him is *Holy Spirit*. That's because at the deepest levels His mission is to impact the Church with Jesus' *holiness*.

One day, “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2). In that day everything will be “Holy to the Lord” in heaven and earth (Isa. 6 with Rev. 4). Even so, the Spirit is concerned with sanctifying the saints (“the people who have been declared holy in Jesus”) between now and then. It's a fulltime process. He's consecrating every true believer along three themes of holiness: from, unto and for. That is, He is separating us *from* sin, while separating us *unto* Christ, even as He is separating us *for* the purpose of glorifying Him forever.

To get the job done the Holy Spirit confronts and contests, in lives and churches, everything that falls short of Christ and His kingship. Just as He will do at the End, today the Spirit unleashes Christ's rule within every community of believers to refine them, purge them, reform them, revive

them and empower them. He's the "fire" with which Jesus promised to baptize His people, incorporating them into one holy and happy society (Lk. 3 and Acts 1 with Rev. 4; also 1 Cor. 12).

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QUOTABLE QUOTE

**The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. The joyful anticipation deepens. All around us we observe a pregnant creation. But it's not only around us; it's within US. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. Waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting.**

(ROMANS 8 — THE MESSAGE)

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His assignment involves more than simply helping us manage ungodly desires. Acting as our intercessor, helper, counselor and comforter (as Jesus spoke of Him), the Holy Spirit seeks to usher us *out of* anything that's incompatible with the Consummation, anything that would bring us shame when we stand before Christ at His appearing (1 Jn. 2). At the same time He intends to usher us *into* encounters with Christ reflective of what it will be like for us the Day we see Him face to face.

In the life of the Church, we might say, the Spirit provides an "interim" experience of how Christ's lordship will prevail in the Consummation. The Spirit imparts preliminary installments of God's pre-ordained plan to transform us into the image of His Son (Rom. 8). Paul tells us the Spirit transports us from glory to glory, in ever-unfolding engagements with the magnificence of the Son of God (2 Cor. 3).

Holiness and supremacy visibly converge within every saint as we become more thoroughly *Christ-like*. The Spirit's indwelling presence assures us that one day we will share a full measure of Christ-likeness.

The process is unceasing. The results are guaranteed. Reflecting on the intended impact of the Spirit's ministry, therefore, a good question for any Christian to keep in mind is this:

*How does every longing, desire, ambition and passion  
the Spirit stirs up within me  
point me more fully toward Christ and enlarge my hope  
in Him as Lord of all?*

Helping you discover fresh and exciting answers to that question is one primary mission of the Breath of God.

### 3. The Church: Approximations of the Consummate *Community* (*Ephesians 3:14-21; 5:23-33*)

In the founding generations of the American colonies the Puritans formed neighborhood prayer meetings where they sang, prayed, discussed recent sermons and took counsel on how to nurture their passion for Christ. One of their number, John Eliot (remembered as the “apostle to the Indians”), called the groups to walk together in such a way that “when thou comest to die, heaven will be no strange place to thee; no, because thou hast been there a thousand times before.” God intends nothing less for any congregation. Each is meant to experience foretastes of the “consummate community” that will move into the Habitations of the Lord.

Between Christ’s ascension and His coming again the Church not only receives God’s promises, but is itself a *revelation* of those promises and how they work, for all peoples to see, and for even heavenly powers to marvel at (Eph. 3). As fully as possible the Church is called to be a preliminary demonstration of what God’s Kingdom purposes in Christ will look like as expressed in *community* throughout eternity.

#### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **What can happen when a congregation sees itself gathered around the King?**

During a time of heightened tensions, with a threat of unwanted schism, a local church near my home asked me to come and help. On the evening I shared my heart with them an unexpected breakthrough began the needed restoration.

At the outset I delivered a Biblical message on the supremacy of Christ. Then, I took the huge, gold trimmed, red velvet pulpit chair that was up on the platform, brought it down below and put it in the center of the group. Next, all the leaders of the congregation — elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, youth ministry staff, the pastors — were invited forward to surround this throne-like structure. Crowded close-in, over forty elders were asked to get down on their knees, as if bowing before a king. In fact, they were asked to “envision” Christ Himself sitting on the chair in our midst. I encouraged everyone to extend their hands and touch some part of the “throne” as we held a spontaneous prayer meeting. After nearly fifteen

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 QUOTABLE QUOTE
 

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**You've come to Mount Zion, the city where the Living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is Judge, with judgments that make us just. You've come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God. He is the Mediator of this covenant .... Do you see what we've got? An unshakable kingdom! And do you see how thankful we must be? Not only thankful, but brimming with worship, deeply reverent before God. For God is not an indifferent bystander. He's actively cleaning house, torching all that needs to burn, and he won't quit until it's all cleansed. God himself is Fire!**

(HEBREWS 12 — THE MESSAGE)

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minutes, I had them pray more specific prayers. I asked them to invite Christ to take up His full role among us once again as Head of the Church, Lord of their lives, and Ruler of their congregation. Repentant weeping could be heard among some. Expectant smiles dawned on the faces of others. There was newfound “peace among the brethren” for most.

Still circling the chair, we concluded by singing to our Redeemer the great hymn “Crown Him with Many Crowns, the Lamb upon His Throne”. It became their public confession. This was how they expected to march forward as a Body. They wanted Him reigning unhindered at the center of their lives together. Many said afterwards they would never be the same again, nor look at Christ the same again, *nor* think about their congregation the same again.

The point made that night was simply this: Jesus is alive, presiding as King, universally available to His Church in the full extent of His supremacy. Therefore, He is able to give powerful expressions of His reign within any congregation whenever we allow Him to draw us together around Himself *in community*. He intends this to approximate how we will experience community life with Him at the Climax. From Him comes a fellowship not unlike what is promised and portrayed in the New Jerusalem. As the head of the Body Christ wants to nourish us now with the

same *quality* of provisions for spiritual fellowship that He will have for us when we join Him at the Great Homecoming (Heb. 12).

Destined to inhabit eternal ages, among the nations this new society is already taking shape around our King. Barriers that separate human beings in this age — tradition, race, ethnicity, age, nationality, or cultural and social status — no longer define who Christians are, any more than these issues will define us in the Resurrection. Instead, Christ is our all, even as He dwells

among us all (Eph. 2-3 with Col. 3). At the deepest level He unites His people in Himself right now, *exactly* the way He will when we visibly surround Him in the Consummation (Jn. 17).

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **Why ought any church bear witness daily to the climax of Christ's reign?**

Ultimately, Christ's reign will transform the entire universe into all it was meant to be. No part of our existence will remain unaffected by His saving power. Yet even now He desires to manifest His supremacy through the company of His followers, doing so by our words and deeds and prayers.

Bible scholars point out that the Greek word for "church" — *ekklesia* — was used in New Testament times to describe an assembly of citizens gathered to hammer out policies for running the city government, or to elect leaders, or even to declare war. In other words, the original meaning of "church" highlighted the activity of "ruling". How appropriate to use the same term to designate a community of redeemed sinners invited to share with Christ in His glorious Kingdom initiatives right where they live.

There's a national church leadership training conference in the U.S. that regularly advertises the rationale for its program with this slogan: "*The Local Church Is the Hope of the World*". But is that true? Isn't it the Lord Jesus Christ who is the great hope God gives to any generation? Of course. But we can still accept their motto by retaining this proviso: The Church is not just a rag-tag remnant trying to survive in a hostile world, "holding the fort" until Jesus returns. The Church offers itself as the hope for the world primarily because we are united in Christ and filled with His Spirit. Our community life consists of nothing less than the firstfruits of the consummation of all things! God's people hold out hope to others because we are the major manifestation of our Monarch's mighty reign in the world today. We are a reflection of what Christ's supremacy looks like when fleshed out in community. We embody hope.

Empowered by the Spirit to unveil the Kingdom of Christ before all peoples in advance of its Apocalyptic Climax, local churches could be called:

- *Advance teams* for the coming King.
- *Signposts and outposts* for the New Jerusalem.
- *Microcosms* of what God intends for the whole universe.

- *Pilot projects and prototypes* of the Eternal Age and its activities.
- *Bases of operation* by which Christ's future reign can invade the present.

As each description suggests, our very lives together bears inescapable testimony to the culmination of Christ's Kingdom. The Church is simultaneously a *herald* as well as a *harbinger* of the Consummation's chief characteristics. As imperfect as it may be, our life together can and should effectively declare our delights over Christ's denouement, right up until the moment He comes back as our conquering Hero.

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#### QUOTABLE QUOTE

**And I ask Him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you will be able to take in with all Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God. God can do anything, you know — far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams. He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, His Spirit deeply and gently within us. Glory to God in the Church! Glory to God in the Messiah, in Jesus! Glory down all the generations! Glory through all millennia! Oh, yes!**

(EPHESIANS 3 — THE MESSAGE)

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To be sure, all that we share in as we walk together as believers — worship, prayer, strategizing for growth, burden-bearing, preaching, neighborhood evangelism, weekly discipleship groups, social reforms among the poor, world missionary outreach — produces a *preliminary* glory. But make no mistake: Preliminary glory is not pretense. It's a genuinely potent glory whenever it touches the nations because it remains Jesus' glory, the glory of His supremacy. And as such it will not fade (2 Cor. 3). That's what makes any local congregation "the hope of the world".

Philip Yancey recalls the drama that unfolded in the well-storied World War II Japanese-run prisoner camp in Burma, located by the River Kwai. After months of untold suffering the prisoners determined to form themselves into an "alternate community" — the opposite of what their tormentors exhibited — a band of brothers filled with joy, faith and compassion. This was their main strategy for survival. Despite the dehumanizing conditions around them they embraced a common hope that their lives would not end in a jungle prison. They anticipated a God-given day of total liberation. Then they cared for one another accordingly. Yancey observes:

“Perhaps something similar to this was what Jesus had in mind as he turned again and again to his favorite topic: the Kingdom of God.”

Without a doubt, in the jail house of this oppressively evil, deadly and chaotic world, Christ has called into existence a radically different fellowship, ordained to thrive while still remaining inside the prison of a fallen planet. It is made up of former prisoners, now liberated-in-heart. They are filled with a vision about the ultimate deliverance of all creation. Planted throughout the nations as “settlements-in-advance” of that coming reign, they seek to set other prisoners free. Because Christ fills His Church with sovereign grace and glory, many dimensions of the Final Liberation can break into the darkest moments. We can experience approximations of the Consummation, *together*. And so can those we touch.

The “Church Universal” — the undivided body of saints, from all ages, out of many nations, in heaven and on earth — can be celebrated even now as the “Church Militant” (theologians’ term for the Body in terms of its current mission to the nations) because on earth it embodies *approximations* of the Consummation. Before very long it will rise up in the Last Day, once and for all, to become forever the “Church Triumphant”, exhibiting the supreme sufficiency of Him “who fills everything in every way”(Eph. 1).

## **4. World Mission:** **Approximations of the Consummate *Triumph*** *(Acts 1:1-11)*

William Carey, considered in some quarters the father of modern Protestant missions, had a good grasp on implications of the fullness of Christ’s supremacy for world outreach. This was evidenced in his widely-acclaimed research published in 1792 on the state of unevangelized peoples. Titled *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians*, the volume drew on promises in Isaiah and other texts to argue the need for ongoing revival and missions. Shortly after its publication, at a district conference for his Baptist denomination Carey and his little prayer band challenged leaders to recover a Christ-exalting hope for the missionary cause. His arguments prevailed. With palpable zeal the current era in global evangelism ensued, eventually

mobilizing the Church worldwide to unleash unprecedented approximations of the consummate triumph of the Kingdom.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **What was the vision behind the beginnings of the modern missionary movement?**

Many Biblical texts used by Carey as well as other missiologists of his day were actually focused much more on God's vision for the Consummation than on missionary activity per se. These leaders combined End-Time hopes with missiological demographics on unreached peoples, to appeal to the Church for a renewed Christology — for a vision of God's Son *big enough* to take on the nations and *big enough* to motivate the Church to reach them with the Gospel at any cost.

In the end it wasn't just statistics on global needs that roused God's servants. Much more, it was this overarching message of Christ's supremacy. Abounding expectations in Him broke the missionary logjam of indifference and unbelief in the 19th century, on both sides of the Atlantic. "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God," Carey preached to every believer. He was convinced foretastes of the Final Victory awaited *all* who would join Christ in the glorious enterprise of world missions.

The same was true of another breakthrough a few decades later. It surfaced at a unique young men's gathering in the summer of 1886. Nearly 200 university students from all over the Northeast met for a college Bible conference at Mount Hermon, Massachusetts, and were led by Dwight Moody (the Billy Graham of that day). One night in the final week of a month of meetings, after ten international students told about the needs of their homelands, the Spirit of God fell in a marvelous way upon those assembled. God harnessed their hearts with hope in Christ. Many of the youth spent the next hours walking alone under the stars to wrestle with God in prayer about His plan for their lives. This visitation climaxed the following day when exactly 100 volunteered for missionary service. That was the beginning of one of the greatest missionary recruitment movements in church history, known as The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (or SVM).

Over the next 30 years nearly 20,000 new missionaries were launched into service from SVM chapters formed on campuses around the world,

while another 75,000 formed the Laymen's Missionary Movement to send them. Beginning with the Concerts of Prayer that SVM chapters conducted to intercede for the advance of Christ's Kingdom, this extraordinary alliance sustained itself by its clear convictions about Christ's sovereign involvement in the outcome. In fact, they coined a motto under which the SVM marched for decades: "The Evangelization of the World in this Generation."

How did they become so boldly visionary? It happened as they fixed youthful spirits not only on Jesus as Lord but also on immediate possibilities for experiencing approximations of the Final Triumphs of His global cause. Anticipating God's promises, they were willing to "go" no matter what.

In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many trends in world evangelization indicate that the hope of Carey and the SVMers is still utterly appropriate. University scholar Philip Jenkins, in his 2003 compendium *The Next Christendom*, used extensive research to fortify the perception that "Christianity exercises an overwhelming global appeal, which shows not the slightest sign of waning." He called today's Christian movement "an uncontrollable brush fire" extending into every nation.

The explosive growth of the Church outside the West has become a harbinger of a Christianity soon to be truly global in scope. In 1900, for instance, approximately 10 million Christians were in Africa. By 2000 there were 360 million. By 2025 conservative projections put the number at nearly 600 million. Similar studies suggest the number of Christians in Latin America in 2025 will be 640 million, and in Asia 460 million. All total, by 2050 we anticipate three billion Christians worldwide. That's one and a half times the number projected for Muslims. Studies show there will be nearly as many Pentecostal Christians at mid-century as the total of all Muslims today.

Even though much remains to be done — over *two billion* children, women and men have not yet heard of hope in Jesus — somewhere in these statistics are the unmistakable cadences of Christ's coming Consummate Reign currently breaking through among earth's peoples!

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **How is missions an extension of Christ's hope-filled reign among nations?**

According to Jesus the End cannot and will not occur apart from the completion of this missionary task. The End is contingent upon our

obedience to finish that task (Matt. 24). The ends of the earth and the end of the age march together toward the consummation of all things.

No wonder virtually every traditional interpretation of the series of events related to the Last Days (no matter how much scholars may differ from one another on specific details) has had positive impact on the Church's motivation for global outreach. All prophetic traditions agree that the goal of history will be achieved preeminently by the summoning of peoples from every tongue and culture into a clear, decisive encounter with the Lord of History. The One who waits to come back wants to be *expected* among all peoples when He returns. Therefore He must be proclaimed throughout all the earth as the supreme hope for all peoples. Only then will the Climax come.

What I'm suggesting is that the mission of the Church is more than a *consequence* of Christ's dominion over the nations. It is equally a *manifestation* of it. World evangelization opens the way for fuller executions of His victorious reign. At this moment our Lord is bringing about unconditional surrender among all earth's peoples. He's doing so redemptively in a way characteristic of the fuller surrender of all creation to Him when He reappears in His glory. Thus, the Church's global mission should seek to influence *all* of life with the blessings of Jesus' lordship. We should do so in a manner commensurate with how we expect this to be experienced in the Kingdom-to-Come.

More and more Christians are replacing the idea of one's "work place" with the term "*life place*". The shift is significant. It reminds us that all believers have been called and are sent by God to specific places and people as our assigned focus for outreach for Christ — in home, school, business, media, health care, factory, neighborhood, government. There in our "life places" we become the primary channels through whom Christ displays His saving power and transforming reign. Approximations of Christ's consummate triumph can happen right where we work or study or serve, simply because we are *there* in His name.

On the other hand world evangelization must always give *primacy* to the planting of churches among the thousands of unreached people groups worldwide. Mission leaders today talk about "a church for every people and the Gospel for every person". What a statement this is on Christ's rights as Redeemer King. For His sake we must be about the business of setting up bases of operation around the globe so that His hope-filled message can

impact every culture. Through evangelism and missions the Church creates *possibilities* for a significant measure of Christ's consummate reign to break into the present among the lost. Every newly established congregation can serve as a dynamic *entry point* for His advancing Kingdom to have its impact.

Missiologists (those who research and plan for missionary advances) suggest that six million new churches are currently needed among over two billion non-Christians for the nations to be effectively reached for Christ and their cultures (and cities) transformed by His power. It is estimated, however, that this can only happen if an additional six hundred thousand intercultural workers are raised up to finish the task and are sent forth by the Holy Spirit from existing congregations on every continent. How do we motivate people to face such needs and tackle such a mission?

The answer is clear: First we must confront and cure the crisis of supremacy that paralyzes so much of the Church and its mission right now. Christians must re-embrace the consummate vision of our Lord's glory. Anything less will prove incapable of sustaining world outreach at the level at which it is required today. Anything less will fail to recruit the hosts of missionary personnel we so urgently need, as well as the army of supporters to send them.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **How can hope in Christ's supremacy impact earth's unreached poor?**

*National Geographic* ran a banner headline in a 2004 article on Johannesburg, South Africa, that read: "Thank you, Father, for giving us freedom. Now, help us to hold onto our dreams." The quote was from the prayer of an Anglican social worker in Seweto (one of the poorest parts of the city) as she led a group of homeless Christians in worship one evening. Their cry expressed their dependency on the supremacy of God's Son, both to explain their blessings (His dismantling of Apartheid) and to secure their endurance (until hopes that come from Him turn into reality).

The fact is, over the centuries missionaries compelled by the hope of Christ's supremacy have been found rooting again and again for the oppressed, the disenfranchised, the unreached. With the Consummation as their touchstone these laborers have tackled down-to-earth realities even as they preached the Gospel of eternal life. They defended the poor. They

fought for moral and social transformation. They opposed evils like slavery, widow burning and infanticide at every turn. They emerged as walking revolutions. They *themselves* became approximations of the Consummation. Why can't the same happen again in our generation?

Hope in the supremacy of Christ is the greatest gift we can bring to the poor and oppressed, whether Christian or non-Christian, anywhere we find them. We need to say so, without apology. The Gospel of the Kingdom heralds how Christ's reign will one day consume forever all economic poverty and human subjugation, along with injustice, illiteracy, tyranny, sickness and disease — and all spiritual darkness. The poor need to hear that and hear it now.

However, simply saying so is not sufficient. Our Message of Hope remains incomplete until we summon the poor into communities of disciples where they can experience preliminary installments of their Sovereign's liberation and begin to labor side by side with renewed confidence for increased justice and social reform where they live. The gospel encourages the poor to nurture exciting expectations and act on them. It incites them to pray for ample approximations of the Kingdom to transform the status quo around them. This is how Christ-exalting deliverance continues to unfold on earth, even in the face of brutal oppressions.

Recently my wife witnessed this truth firsthand in India when she visited with a particular sub-group of Dalits, the self-named Untouchables numbering nearly 200 million. Born into the occupation of "latrine cleaning", the Bhangi Dalits had no way out because of the Hindu caste system, that is, until the Gospel restored to many hope and dignity. Thousands have turned to Christ. They are experiencing His reign in the most practical ways — including education, hygiene, retraining and community transformation, along with worship and discipleship. Hundreds of new churches planted among them have sustained this wholesale spiritual and social people-movement. Even the Indian government has been forced to take notice of the significant benefits.

I've seen Christ's reign displayed in equal fashion through varieties of churches and Christian ministries working among some of earth's most destitute urban communities in places like Manila, Seweto, Calcutta and even New York City. Unquestionably, as God's people minister to them in the fullness of Christ's supremacy, the poor retain front row seats for redemptive dramas that mirror the Consummation. "Through a

worldwide migration to the city God may be setting the stage for Christian mission's greatest and perhaps final hour", reflects urban scholar Roger Greenway.

At the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian statesman Billy Graham convened 10,000 itinerate evangelists in Amsterdam. The invitees were made up mostly of poorer Christians from the Two Thirds World. Dr. Graham's goal was to challenge and train them for the task up ahead. During his final address to the delegation this seasoned witness to the nations (for over fifty years) called them to look far enough beyond their poverty and seeming powerlessness to focus resolutely on their hope in the supremacy of God's Son. Listen in:

*Let us light a fire*  
of renewed faith  
to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ  
in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the ends of the earth.  
Using every resource at our command  
and with every ounce of our strength.  
*Let us light a fire* in this generation  
that, by God's grace, will never be put out.  
*Let us light a fire*  
that will guide men and women into tomorrow and eternity.  
Let the Light of the World shine throughout the whole earth  
until He comes again.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **Why should a vision for the future drive our mission to the nations today?**

It was recently estimated that 70% of all progress toward completing the Great Commission has taken place since 1900; that 70% of that has occurred since World War II; and that 70% of that came about toward the close of the 1990's. Missionary statesman Dr. Ralph Winter said it well: "We have before us the brightest set of hope-filled resources, the most extensive global network of eager believers in thousands of prayer cells and strategizing committees. We have never, ever had as many competent, sold-out soldiers for Jesus Christ. The job to be done is now dramatically smaller *in terms of our resources* than ever before." Even more encouraging, the "all authority in heaven and earth" that our Master claims (Mt. 28) gives us

every reason to expect marvelous advances of His mission — because that authority guarantees His Consummate Triumph.

Dr. Luis Bush put it in a fascinating way. Formerly the international director of the *AD 2000 Movement*, Bush guided a global effort that created a coalition of thousands of leaders from mission agencies and churches in nearly 200 nations to accelerate the cause of world evangelization as we headed into the Third Millennium. Following that initiative he became the director of *World Inquiry* and was charged with conducting consultations in various countries to discuss increased global cooperation for the Great Commission. Having returned from a trip that convened hundreds of national mission leaders from a score of nations, Bush delivered a report to American Christians in which he said: “The Biblically-based goal of mission is the consummation of all things in Jesus Christ.” He proceeded to quote from Ephesians 1:9-10: “And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” Then He concluded with this stunning statement: “*Christian mission is future-driven.*”

And so it is. With Jesus as Lord the future is already upon us — and it *drives* our mission for Him. Daily the Church seeks to saturate the world with this future and its promise (Jer. 29) — with a Message of Hope shaped by Christ’s glorious greatness. Our task as “World Christians” is, in fact, to infect people everywhere with desires that can only be fulfilled in Jesus, so that they turn to pursue Him with all their hearts. Our privilege is also to enlist lost ones — including the poor, and especially the poor — to participate with Him in God’s future, laboring with His people toward the Final Victory.

As an approximation of the Consummation, mission outreach not only exposes people to the promises of God but summons them into a life of *readiness* for so much more (Rom. 5). While anticipating the royal return of God’s Regent, the Church must also remain prepared, at any given moment, to experience greater displays of His dominion right now — to step into practical involvements with Him in the advance of His Kingdom right where they live as well as to the ends of the earth.

The reality of Christ’s coming glory provides the healthiest heartbeat for Christ’s global cause.

## 5. Revival:

### Approximations of the Consummate Awakening

(Ezekiel 31:1-28)

One of history's most perceptive writers on the topic of revival was Jonathan Edwards. A brilliant New England pastor/scholar during the early to mid 1700's, Edwards argued that revival held a central place in the revealed purposes of God.

Here's how he reasoned: God's objective in creation is to prepare a Kingdom for His Son. All of God's providential activities, reinforced by Christ's coronation, are moving unhesitatingly toward the consummation of all things. Based on that fundamental theological non-negotiable, Edwards concluded, the *revival* of God's people must comprise one of Christ's most strategic activities between His Ascension and Return. In fact, the renewal of the Church is God's way of shepherding history and nations toward the inevitable culmination of Christ's Kingdom.

Edwards wrote: "Universal dominion is pledged to Christ. In the interim, the Father implements this pledge in part by successive outpourings of the Spirit [revival] which prove the reality of Christ's Kingdom to a skeptical world and serve to extend its bounds." Fortunately he had the privilege of observing revival firsthand across his own New England, and eventually in his own congregation (the largest outside Boston at the time). Scholars call the phenomenon "The First Great Awakening".

#### THINK WITH ME ...

#### **Why does revival under Christ always ignite a *forward* look?**

Revival was a shared experience by saints in both Old and New Testaments. There was a difference, however, between the two eras in how the experience played itself out. In the Old Testament the reviving of Israel is usually characterized by a look *back* as the nation sought to return to previous high-water marks in Israel's religious pilgrimage. For example, note how Elijah on Mt. Carmel challenged Israel to return to days of spiritual faithfulness before Baal worship had taken over (2 Kings 18); or recall how Hezekiah refurbished the time-worn temple and reinstated the ancient Passover tradition, shaping the revival that emerged under his watch.

In the New Testament revival is characterized much more as a look *forward*. It is focused on fresh extensions of Christ's reign among His

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 QUOTABLE QUOTE

**He has enriched your whole lives, from the words on your lips to the understanding in your hearts. And you have been eager to receive his gifts during this time of waiting for his final appearance. He will keep you steadfast in the faith to the end so that when his day comes you need fear no condemnation. God is utterly dependable, and it is he who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

(1 CORINTHIANS 1 —  
PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

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people and into the world. Consider, as a case study, the prayer meeting of Acts 4: what they prayed; how God answered; the aftermath in the succeeding stories of missionary advance — all of which was forward looking.

In a Christ-dominated revival the Holy Spirit increases vision for what's *ahead*. He deepens our yearnings for greater approximations of the coming Kingdom. Because Christ in His supremacy dwells among His people, we should not be surprised that periods of renewal involve more than momentary “visitations” from God (an Old Testament concept). In New Testament-style revival, Christians are aroused to a reality of Christ's presence and power already theirs, but currently overlooked. They are summoned not only to recapture their first love for Him (Rev. 2) but also to discover a passion for Him that surpasses whatever they have known before (Eph. 3). Re-awakening us to greater dimensions of His glory, New Testament revival is ultimately

about recovering and enlarging hope in Jesus as Lord.

That's why, as Edwards observed, revival is arguably the most dramatic display of Jesus' lordship in the present age. In no way depreciating God's “ordinary” work with us on a daily basis, these *exceptional* seasons of His “extraordinary” work accelerate every other foretaste of the Age-to-Come that God intends for His people. Let's study it in a little more detail

**THINK WITH ME ...**

**What words help describe the hope in Christ that revival brings?**

Church historians have developed a variety of words to describe these unusual epochs, including:

- Reformation
- Restoration
- Renewal
- Renaissance
- Renovation
- Resuscitation

All these terms point to a similar phenomenon: In revival Christ sovereignly quickens and restores His Church in order to help Christians enter more fully into His reign. Using other modifiers, we might say that New Testament revival promises us wonderful seasons when the reign of Christ is:

- Amplified
- Broadened
- Clarified
- Unleashed
- Sharpened
- Extended
- Deepened
- Expanded
- Quickened

The Biblical phrase “outpourings of the Holy Spirit” (sometimes called “infusions”) is an excellent picture of revival. The metaphor recalls the force of a monsoon. It represents God deluging His people so as to empower them to more fully engage His purposes in Christ. God floods His Church with fresh hope, passion, prayer and mission by refocusing us on Christ for ALL He really is. *Revival is a church saturated with the supremacy of Christ by the Spirit of Christ.*

Whatever term is most helpful to you, each one reminds us that revival is more than just an event in a church calendar. Inherently revival is an ongoing *process*. When God re-energizes a community of Christians, He intends Kingdom results that last many years. Scholars’ research verifies that, following each one of the four so-called “Great Awakenings” in American history (early 1700’s, late 1700’s, mid 1800’s, early 1900’s), decades of documented transformations took place both in churches and in society. God gave His people “fresh winds”, not simply to fire up enthusiasm for spiritual things but also to extend further the reign of His Son within communities and nations through His Church.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **What does it look like when Christ rules a people through revival?**

Here’s one story to demonstrate how revival can impact a whole nation for Christ’s Kingdom. As you read it, ask yourself: “Is this the kind of ‘approximation’ I would like to experience where I live?”

At the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a wonderful move of God, with all the earmarks of the Consummation, came to the beleaguered nation of Uganda.

Once known as the “jewel of Africa”, this beautiful land had become devastated, physically and spiritually, by multiple oppressive regimes headed by diabolical dictators. Economically Africa’s bread-basket had become its worst “basket case”. Most distressing, tens of thousands of Christians were martyred for their faith, many by unspeakable tortures.

As a result, in the late 1990’s hundreds of thousands in the churches began to cry out to God for a spiritual awakening in their land. The believers grappled with the need for soul-searching repentance inside the Church. They confessed all the ways they were actually complicit in His judgments on Uganda as a whole. Broken in spirit, they pled for God’s mercy. They faced their own unfaithfulness and indifference to the massive East African Revivals (as they were known) just a few short decades earlier. How quickly they had turned away from Christ’s powerful work among them toward the beginning of the century!

Finally God answered their cries. Joyous confidence about Christ’s Kingdom re-ignited their churches. Passion for the Promise-Giver once again marked thousands of congregations large and small. But this was just the beginning of revival.

At the same time ungodly strongmen were unexpectedly expelled. Corrupt structures of oppression were decisively dismantled. Political and religious prisoners were set free. Persecution of the Church came to an end. A devoutly righteous Christian leader became Uganda’s president. He made his first official act a public re-dedication of the entire nation to Jesus Christ as its Lord!

Following that, to the amazement of all, significant economic recovery began. Far more importantly, in Uganda (once known as the African nation with the largest AIDS epidemic) a nationwide commitment to sexual abstinence turned back the plague. It rendered Uganda the country with the least threat of AIDS — all in just one decade! Some of the largest churches in Africa could now be found there, with one in Kampala growing from a few hundred to nearly 15,000 in five years. Fasting and prayer became a way of life for Ugandan Christians as they sought even deeper manifestations of Christ’s reign in their generation.

To these African believers every change “felt” as if the Consummation had already broken in upon them. As a result Christians began to hunger for something greater, something beyond just national renovation. Their prayers became heart-sighs for nothing less than Christ’s return to set up

His Kingdom in fullest measure among them, as well as throughout Africa and among the nations.

Stories like this are multiplying everywhere. A half-decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of Latin America's leading evangelists, addressing an all-night prayer vigil of 250,000 in Mexico City, declared: "Latin America is at the threshold of an enormous spiritual awakening!" The Argentine-born Alberto Mottesi continued: "I'm not speaking of a spiritual revival, but a spiritual awakening. This will bring forth revival in the economic, political and social arenas. It reminds me of what happened in Martin Luther's Reformation which became the preamble to the Renaissance, affecting the arts and culture. We are going to see something similar in Latin America."

Surely these are the kinds of stories God is willing to compose for His Son within churches and communities everywhere. Call it revival. Call it spiritual awakening. But call it, without a doubt, "approximations of the Consummation"!

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **Why might "arrival" be the best metaphor to use for revival?**

At the Last Day, in the consummate revival — the *Final Revival* — the entire universe will be awakened fully to all that Christ is. It will be summoned into full participation in His unconditional lordship. In every other revival, though on a lesser scale, God still wants to pursue a recovery of more comprehensive visions of His Son among His people.

Every other revival takes its cue from the Final Revival (see Halverson's words at the opening of this chapter). In hundreds of revival episodes the past twenty centuries we discover replays of the central themes of the Final Revival activated *in principle* by Christ each time He makes Himself known more powerfully tangible among His people.

Steve Hawthorne suggests revival might, therefore, be called "*arrival*". It's as if Christ "shows up" in His Church afresh to re-capture us and reconquer us. Isaiah 60, for example, suggests God's glory was *already* breaking over them like a sunrise, exposing many dimensions of His Kingdom purposes to them. Already the encounter had begun. What they needed to do was "rise and shine" and seize the day. That's why Biblical texts frequently use the motif of *encounter* to describe spiritual renewal. We find this in Isaiah's picture of a future when God would rend the heavens like a garment, visibly descending like a fire upon saints and nations alike (Isa. 64).

The Puritans coined a great phrase to define the “arrival” experience. They called such seasons “*the manifest presence of Christ*”. Here is how they reasoned. First, they said, there is Christ’s *essential* presence. That is, Christ is everywhere present all the time. We are never far from Him, nor He from us. He is unavoidable. Second, they also talked about Christ’s *cultivated* presence. Christians can enrich their sense of fellowship with Him as they abide in Him day by day, faithfully obeying Him. We may cultivate a deeper knowledge of the Lord through Bible study and prayer. As we do, Christ shows Himself to be much more present in our lives than we had realized.

The *manifest* presence of Christ was something else altogether. This was the Puritans’ third term for those times when God reveals His Son to a new generation of His people. He does so in such dramatic fashion that it almost seems as if Christ has been hiding from us until that moment. Then suddenly He reinserts Himself among us. He arrives. This encounter cannot be cultivated. It is a *gift* from the living God. It is an “awakening” historians say. It must simply be received. Many promises of Scripture that describe Christ’s coming in glory — His ultimate manifest presence — were applied *in principle* by the Puritans to any period of corporate spiritual awakening. The Puritans would most likely be comfortable in calling revival an “approximation of the Consummation”.

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **Why should Christ Himself form the central definition of revival?**

One could almost say that revival is like a *coronation*. It leads believers to reaffirm their wholehearted devotion to the Lamb who sits on the Throne (Rev. 5). It reconnects them to His marching orders as their King. It serves as a powerful *sign* of the supremacy of Christ. The renewing reality of revival should be basically defined as this: Jesus expressing Himself more fully to His people *as Lord*.

In point of fact, one cannot think rightly about revival at all if one does not think rightly about the glory of God’s Son. He is the criterion by which we measure both revival’s legitimacy and its impact. The Final Revival will emerge from fresh in-breakings of Christ’s sovereign dominion before every creature in heaven and earth. But we can taste of this Coming Climax in a *preliminary* fashion as the Spirit spreads abroad re-awakenings to Christ for ALL that He is.

Until the Consummation our Redeemer intends to continue invading His Church, extending His lordship among us, regaining the praise He rightfully deserves, and enlarging His mission through us among all earth's peoples. Edwards was on target: Revival is one of the most exciting expressions of Christ's supremacy any Christian can experience until He comes again.

When He does we will enter into an awakening of such unparalleled proportions that all the other awakenings will become, by comparison, like the faded memories of childhood adventures.

## 6. Spiritual Warfare: Approximations of the Consummate *Battle*

*(1 Peter 4:1-5, 13-19; 5:4, 6-11)*

Along with promises of reviving grace, other passages sound forewarnings of retribution and wrath. For multitudes of mortals as well as droves of demons, the Great Judgment Hour looms ominously. The Judge has been appointed (Jn. 5). He has the supremacy in everything (Col. 1). He has all authority in heaven and earth (Mt. 28). He will carry out with finality every sentence handed down by Heaven's Court (Acts 17).

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **Where around us do we see the judgments of the Lord revealed already?**

To *Christians* the judgments of the Lord bring significant comfort. The fulfillment of our destiny in Jesus desperately requires them. Caught up in a battle raging fiercely among the nations, this war remains beyond our meager abilities to resolve. The ages-long conflict must be — in fact, can *only* be — terminated by Messiah in His Reign of Righteousness when He visibly descends as Supreme Commander (2 Thess. 1 with Rev. 19). Only then will all sin be put away and all of Heaven's enemies defeated. What a gloriously awesome prospect of victory held out for every believer!

According to the prophets, however, disquieting spasms of the Final Battle can be felt already. Daily we experience initial engagements with Malignant Forces. Current combats with Dark Powers rock the nations and

foreshadow a judgment that will soon shake the universe. Sometimes this takes the form of:

- Famines and natural disasters
- Wars and terrorism
- Plagues and epidemics
- Financial collapses
- Civil chaos and revolutions
- Dehumanizing poverty

From one perspective such tragedies are inevitable in a fallen world, separated as it is from its Creator. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6). These eruptions bear witness that all humankind reaps what it sows (Gal. 6). Time and again in its hardhearted and treasonous rebellion, the world has sown the seeds of its own destruction.

From another perspective, however, such sorrows must be viewed as God’s *preliminary punishments* of a rebel race. They are urgent wake-up calls extended to mortals everywhere. God is “shouting in the pain” (as C. S. Lewis put it), urging them to repent and seek the only hope they have, held out by a Redeemer who rules unrelentingly over every upheaval. Apart from Jesus’ blood and righteousness, all peoples continue to dwell under the frown of the Almighty, facing only further installments of such cataclysms — precursors of the full fury of Christ that awaits the nations not long from now (Rev. 15-19).

In quite a different way God’s righteous wrath is experienced daily and universally. It cannot be avoided. It is experienced in His overarching decision (according to Romans 1) to “give over” and “give up” the human race to its own devices. He permits earth’s peoples to replace a passion for His glory with preoccupations, arrogant ambitions and idolatrous treasures. Apart from Christ’s saving work no other option is left to sinners. They remain “without God and without hope in the world” (Eph. 2). One major way Christ exercises His sovereignty is simply by *withdrawing* the benefits of God’s mercy from those who persistently reject His presence and piety and power.

That leaves nations and peoples to work out their destinies by themselves. But they must do so inside Enemy-occupied territory. This has been our lot since the fall of Adam. Our attempts are futile, and our efforts are fatal.

**THINK WITH ME ...****How did you discover Christ's opposition to the unseen dark powers?**

God's judgments, executed in the midst of raging combat, are *unseen* by most of us most of the time though the theater of this battle enlarges daily (Eph. 6). The acceleration of warfare is unavoidable. Solid advances of Christ's Kingdom (of which there are many!) can not be ignored by demonic hosts about to be crushed in His wake. In many ways, our hope hinges on how Christ's supremacy is expressed in the unseen dimensions. He must expel Satan and his subjects from the universe, and the Enemy knows it. By proclaiming His victory we rebuff counter-claims made by forces of evil.

Our testimony to the glory of Jesus, especially to fellow believers, helps expose the empty intimidations of Hell. It challenges the Devil's very legitimacy and calls him into question. Wherever hope in Christ is heralded and believed, a *limit* is automatically set on the deceptions of Evil. Whenever we help fellow Christians get a larger vision of Jesus, strongholds raised against His dominion inside the Church are torn down (2 Cor. 10). This hope exorcises the crisis of supremacy from *our* midst — which is always the prior step toward dislodging Satan among the nations.

In His earthly ministry when our Lord cast out demons, He defined such work as evidence that the Kingdom was near. It was the proof that His immediate, temporal victories approximated the triumphs at the End (Matt. 12). When, for example, He prepared to deliver a social outcast from a legion of demons, the evil spirits understood what His act foreshadowed. So they pleaded with Jesus to let them be temporarily spared the ultimate judgment (Matt. 8). When His disciples went on their first preaching expeditions, He interpreted their results the same way — apocalyptically. He explained that He saw Satan fall from Heaven as they ministered (Lk. 10).

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**QUOTABLE QUOTE**

**But if it's *God's* finger I'm pointing that sends the demons on their way, then God's Kingdom is here for sure. When a strong man, armed to the teeth, stands guard in his front yard, his property is safe and sound. But what if a stronger man comes along with superior weapons? Then he's beaten at his own game, the arsenal that gave him such confidence hauled off, and his precious possessions plundered. This is war, and there is no neutral ground. If you're not on my side, you're the enemy; if you're not helping, you're making things worse.**

(LUKE 11 — THE MESSAGE)

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Repeatedly the Bible records that Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil (1 Jn. 3). He came to render Satan powerless, trouncing him under the feet of His followers (Heb. 2 and Rom. 16). He came to tear down every demonic device that defies the Gospel. He came to release captives from the Deceiver of the nations (Rev. 12) and to lead them into glorious service to Himself as the Delight of the saints.

At this very hour the Empire of the Son continues to advance — relentlessly — through His Church against Armies of Spiritual Destruction. Christ is displacing the works of Satan in every area of human experience. He is dethroning our adversary, one sphere after another. He's supporting sabotage against the dominions of darkness, liberating nations and peoples from enemy strangleholds. This is reminiscent of how He will conquer all Principalities in the day they flee His holy presence forever (Rev. 20).

Therefore, in Ephesians 6 Christians are urged to wear armor that's fully adequate to the intensity of spiritual warfare in which we're immersed. Properly clothed, the Church can foreshadow Christ's heavenly army in Revelation 19 as it descends with Him to do battle at the end of the Age. Since substantial installments of the Consummate Victory can be expected even today, *we should dress like it*. As Paul writes again: "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.... Christ" (Rom. 13). Attired accordingly, we can enter into Christ's End-Times triumphs *now* in ways that guarantee the outcome of the Final Battle *later*. Should this not encourage us to serve Him without reserve, and without fear?

It's impossible to know King Jesus and not celebrate daily both the exhaustiveness of His battle plans as well as our incorporation, right now, into His victory procession (2 Cor. 2). We march with Him against every barrier raised to defy our King among the nations. The hordes of hell have no way — they literally have no hope — of ever neutralizing the triumphs of Christ's Church as we continue to spread the Gospel throughout the earth. Our public confession of the Messiahship of our Master scatters darkness at every turn (Mt. 16).

### **THINK WITH ME ...**

#### **Why must preliminary installments of Christ's victory often be so *costly* for us?**

But let's not be surprised by how *costly* approximations can be (especially those recorded in this chapter). Every foretaste of glory invades enemy

camps. Satan is not ignorant of how every victory displays Christ's grand intentions. Nor will he take such assaults lying down. To be involved in Christ's global cause will involve all of us in various forms of Christ's sufferings. This does not bring His supremacy into question, however. To the contrary, it confirms the glory of it even more.

Evil is not merely moral deficiency. Evil is a personal, heavily entrenched rebellion against the living God. Evil is not merely the absence of the good. Rather, it is an intentional and personal attack upon the good. *Warfare* is not too strong a term, therefore. We are fighting immense, depraved and malevolent beings. There will be temporary casualties among soldiers of the Cross.

As the Church embraces more of the approximations of the Consummation destined for our generation — and in so doing enters into more of the fullness of Christ's supremacy — we can expect this development to arouse the Anti-forces. It will push them into defensive action against us. The successful extension of Christ's reign, first into our congregations and then into our communities and nation, will inevitably whip up whirlpools of resistance in the invisible realm, created by the convergence of two diametrically opposed powers, only one of which is destined to prevail, and both of which know Who that will be.

We must match demonic death threats with fuller expressions of Christ's dominion, first in our lives and then in our churches. The glory of Christ's authority must be visibly and substantially manifested *in us* by the power of the Holy Spirit, dominating us in a manner equal to the intensity of the battle we fight. At the same time all expectations of prevailing in combat — of magnifying Christ's righteousness and love, as well as furthering His opposition to all ungodliness — depend directly on our willingness to lay down our lives when He asks for it. We must be willing, Jesus said, to *die* for the fame of His Name and for the spread of His claim (Mk. 8 with 2 Cor. 4).

This has been the pattern throughout Church history. Glorious Gospel conquests have normally been accompanied by persecution, even martyrdom. Not even Christ Himself could secure God's promises, or grapple effectively with the Powers opposed to them, without the shedding of His blood. Why should we assume He would not ask the same of us? In fact, the willingness of Christians to pay a price for the Gospel is testimony to their hope about its sure and certain triumph. It provides additional irrefutable evidence of the legitimacy of our vision of the supremacy of God's Son.

Maybe that's why the *World Christian Encyclopedia* records that the 20<sup>th</sup> century not only witnessed the most spectacular advances of church growth in history, but also recorded a march of martyrs that equaled the combined number from all previous nineteen centuries put together!

Each intensification of opposition forces should greatly encourage us. For all parties involved it verifies the undisputed status of Christ's throne. It is a strong indicator that His Kingdom is effectively *growing*. It proves that the Consummation is drawing nearer. The world's spiritual conflagrations, both the seen and the unseen, will culminate soon. This will take place when God's untempered judgments firmly and permanently dismantle Satan's domains, at the visible return of his Arch Enemy, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

One day, to our utter joy, the armies will confront each other in one grand Cosmic Conflict. This will usher in a New Heaven and Earth "in which righteousness will have its home" (2 Pet. 3). Then our hope in Christ will be vindicated once and for all, as we emerge as Overcomers (Rev. 2, 3) witnessed by angelic hosts shouting "Hallelujah!" before His Throne (Rev. 15).

Until then, we must wage spiritual war in Jesus' name. We must do so by the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6), confronting the Powers and loving the unredeemed, one skirmish after another. We can do this by advancing the hope of the Gospel in ways that approximate the War-to-End-All-Wars. In fact, God invites us to engage the Destroyer in such a fashion that our struggle not only prefigures the Final Battle, but actually contributes to *shaping* its glorious outcome.

## **APPROXIMATIONS ...**

### **IN NEW YORK CITY AND WHERE YOU LIVE**

Hundreds of pastors throughout New York City have banded together for many years in an unprecedented metropolitan prayer movement. Nearly seventeen hundred churches and 75,000 people have joined forces in hundreds of concerted prayer gatherings. I've had the privilege of watching much of it unfold firsthand.

The entire movement has been linked together by what is called "The New York Prayer Covenant". It is like a manifesto, a brief document that defines a

four-fold agenda for all the praying. Despite extraordinary denominational and ethnic diversity among Christians in the Big Apple, all of us can pray enthusiastically about these four concerns. Called the “Four R’s” they put our hope squarely on Christ’s shoulders in four key areas:

- *Revival* in the Church
- *Reconciliation* among churches and races
- *Reformation* of society
- *Reaching* the lost

Increasingly God is answering our ambitious four-fold petition. As a result, many in New York have experienced meaningful “approximations of the Consummation”. For example (to mention only four of them):

- Unprecedented unity and love among the city’s pastors are visible to its citizens and openly honored by city officials (revival).
- Bridges of trust among churches have prevented bloodshed in neighborhoods during times of racial tensions (reconciliation).
- Extraordinary reduction in many types of crime in the city have amazed the watching nation (reformation).
- Some of the largest evangelistic outreaches ever sponsored in North America have been organized in New York over recent years (reaching).

But the prayer movement has refused to let itself become self-satisfied. Rather, the magnitude of previous answers has stirred us to seek God for a whole lot more. Christ’s manifest presence in New York City, especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001, has actually renewed the determination of many to be more passionate in our prayers and witness. We have discovered an abounding hope for our city that draws on nothing less than a vision of the Consummation. Preliminary installments of that vision have made us doubly determined to keep on praying. Even as I write this paragraph, plans are underway for over 10,000 Christians to spend three days walking every street of the entire city next month, praying over every single residence and business and asking the Father to let the saving glory of Jesus be manifested in every place.

How about the street where *you* live? What approximations are waiting to unfold for you there?

All of us need to become like little children. We need to stand on tiptoe waiting for the parade of God's promises to round the corner and march straight into our churches and neighborhoods with the life-giving fullness of Jesus. You have every right to expect this. Resounding breakthroughs of His reign await you, here and now, even on the street where *you* live.

Until the moment all saints behold His splendor with joy unspeakable, none of us should grow weary in our pursuit of more of Christ's glory revealed *now*. This means we need to be about the business of confronting the crisis of supremacy wherever we find it (beginning in ourselves and in our churches). We also must be about the business of helping God's people give over their lives to the Savior in ways that transform us day by day, right where we dwell.

Which brings us to the issue of *passion*: As the Father pours out more of the fullness of Jesus on His people, what kind of passion for His Person should we show? Is there a special *fervency* Christ's supremacy ought to inspire in His followers? Is there a certain display of devotion for the dominion of His Son that God desires from us? Is there a measure of intensity He's looking for in our determination to experience the full extent of His lordship?

If we expect to overflow at the End with one *consuming passion* for our Redeemer — unbounded, unending and undistracted, inspired by ALL the hope He is for us — should we not strive to savor Him with similarly deepening affections right now? Does our Lord deserve any less than this?

Those are the right questions. And they bring us to one final chapter in **Volume I's** survey of the glory of the Son of God. Far more than the previous chapters, this next study will probably prove to be the most challenging for your *personal* experience of life under the lordship of Jesus.

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#### QUOTABLE QUOTE

**God's readiness to give and forgive is now public. This new life is starting right now, and is whetting our appetites for the glorious day when our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, appears. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously. God's gift has restored our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come — an eternity of life! You can count on this.**

(TITUS 2 AND 3 — THE MESSAGE)

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