

1997

Tuesday, January 21st - Song of Solomon 5: 10, 11

The newly-wed wife, having first described her husband in terms of his essential and pervasive glory (v.10), goes on to describe him in some detail from head to foot. From her description we learn that Solomon is to her noble, sweet, strong, precious, and wholly desirable. The testimony we offer to the world concerning our heavenly Solomon should be no less detailed and engaging.

Wednesday, January 22nd - Song of Solomon 5: 11

Some English versions translate the opening words of this verse: "*His hand is like gold...*," when, in fact, the word, *isar*, should be translated, *his head*. That she likens his head to pure gold tells us that his mind is pure, his thoughts and intentions are rich and noble. His mind dwells ever on the most excellent things (Phil. 4:8); his affections ever tend heavenward (Col. 3:1-4). Jesus certainly fixed His mind ever on heaven, and on the love and glory of His heavenly Father. The result was that the glory of His Father was manifested through His words and actions--all of which issued from His holy thoughts.

Thursday, January 23rd - Song of Solomon 5: 11

The noble head is framed with thick, black hair. Such dark hair conveys seriousness, sobriety, even an element of mystery. These qualities are not incongruous with such previously named attributes as brightness, purity, and warmth. Rather, these diverse qualities combine in a rich, balanced harmony of character. While it is true that our heavenly Solomon is lovingly intimate and transparent with us, He also has a serious and reserved dimension to Him. There are awesome depths contained in the character of the Lover of our souls.

Friday, January 24th - Song of Solomon 5: 12

As the description moves to the eyes, we are told that they are like doves. When she looked into such eyes, she would behold warmth, softness, tenderness, purity, innocence, and most kind love. She had perhaps seen those eyes crying with exquisite sympathy, for she mentions the doves being beside streams of water. Her Solomon was not unwilling or unable to convey the depth of his loving feeling for her through the windows of his soul. Neither is our heavenly Solomon reluctant to manifest His sympathy, even His tears of grief, such as He displayed at the tomb of Lazarus. The whites of Solomon's eyes are not described in the cold and inadequate language of science. She does not see the sclera of his eyes, so much as she sees all that is good, gentle, peaceful, wholesome, and even nourishing. The eyes of our Solomon are not mere instruments of His perception, but are orbs of His giving of Himself to us in love.

Saturday, January 25th - Song of Solomon 5: 12

We who are Christ's cannot now look into His eyes, except by faith. By the exercise of faith we can, as it were, study the truly human and very divine eyes of Jesus. From our reverent and devoted reading of God's Word we learn to see not only the eyes of our Lord, but we learn to see all things through them. The divine Lover of our souls reveals to us His perspective through His Word. That perspective is vibrant and full of nourishing love for His bride.

Sunday, January 26th - Song of Solomon 5: 13

The cheeks of Solomon are described in terms conveying attractive colors, textures, and fragrances. His face is at once vibrant, strong, sweet, and refreshing. His lips are said to be as shapely as lilies, emitting the delicate fragrance of that flower as well as the heavier sweetness of myrrh. Has the mouth of anyone on

earth uttered such potent, sweet, and invitingly lovely words as did the mouth of Jesus? We may also recall in this connection how He conveyed power to His disciples through His breathing on them and telling them to receive the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22). There is no more lovely or loving mouth than His.

Monday, January 27th - Song of Solomon 5: 14, 15

When we are brought to consider the body of Solomon, we behold massive strength as well as delicate beauty combined most attractively. His hands have fingers of the same substance as his head, gold. Through this development of the image we learn that as the thoughts of Solomon's mind are pure and noble, so are the deeds of his hands. There is with him complete integrity of thought and action--both being good and precious. Even the beauty and strength of such a detail as his fingernails is noted, she likening them to the hard and lustrous mineral, beryl. Nothing about him is insignificant. Nothing about him is weak, common, or unattractive. Everything, down to the smallest detail, is noble, precious, and powerful in him and in our heavenly Solomon.

Tuesday, January 28th - Song of Solomon 5: 14, 15

The bride likens her husband's abdomen to carved ivory with inlaid sapphires, a beautiful way to describe his white skin covering strong bands of muscles interlaced with vibrant veins. Here she speaks of a more private part of his body, but she would have intimate knowledge of those aspects of Him largely hidden from general view. Once again we are told that strength and beauty combine throughout his being. There is nothing hidden in our Christ which, when lovingly revealed to us by Him, will be seen to be weak, inferior, or unattractive.

Wednesday, January 29th - Song of Solomon 5: 15

The combination of strength and beauty is further seen when the legs of Solomon are described as pillars of alabaster, and his feet as pedestals of gold. His legs, the instruments of his standing and of his movement, are perfect, precious, and of immense strength. The feet, as with the head and hands, are composed of pure gold. Every thought of his head, every work of his hands, and every step of his way is thus revealed to be noble, pure, precious, and costly. He is and does only that which is of highest excellence and greatest beauty. His beauty attracts those who love him, while his strength protects and provides for them.

Thursday, January 30th - Song of Solomon 5: 15, 16

Once again the bride returns to a consideration of the overall appearance of her beloved. He is majestic, being as straight, true, and immense as Lebanon's cedars. There is absolutely nothing small, weak, cheap, or ugly about him. Rather, he possesses every virtue in unsurpassed degree. Nor does he stand aloof and alone. He seeks to communicate something of his graceful regality through the sweet speech of his mouth. He is not a statue to admire; he is a living lover, who communicates his own excellencies to those whom he embraces. Thus does our Christ, by His Word, present Himself to us and invite us to partake of Him with reverent familiarity and holy intimacy.

Friday, January 31st - Song of Solomon 5: 16

The words of the world are cruel and cutting, or seductively manipulative, but never sweet and substantial as are the words of Christ. We should remind ourselves that the description of Solomon (vv. 10-16)--who stands as a type of Christ--is not a slick and exaggerated advertisement, such as we encounter in the world. Here is a clear description of Christ, which is inspired by God's Holy Spirit, apprehended in loving detail, and published with faithful accuracy. And though this testimony be highly accurate, when we shall see Him face to face we shall be obliged to declare that not the half has been told us.

Saturday, February 1st - Song of Solomon 5: 16

By the love of Christ and the gift of faith we may claim our propriety in Christ. Each believer may rightly and rejoicingly say of Him: "He is *my* friend (Jn. 15:13-15); He is *my* beloved (1 Jn. 4:16-19)." We may act foolishly in our dream-like distractions and spurn Him for a time. Yet when we come to ourselves we will go to any lengths to find Him, for our satisfaction and loving repose are found in Him alone. Christ is our beloved, whom we adore, and our friend whom we respect.

Sunday, February 2nd - Song of Solomon 6: 1-3

In 5: 9 the chorus asked about the character of the bride's beloved. Now the chorus inquires regarding his location and occupation. To these questions the bride responds with remarkable depth and detail. She knows who her beloved is; she knows what he does and where to find him. She knows that even when he appears to be absent, he is ever found tending his garden and shepherding his flock. Though Christ is the King of glory, He is now and ever hereafter the good Shepherd, tending with loving care His Church. The bride of Christ may feel at times that her Lord is about other business, but, in fact, He never is. He ever lives to make intercession for us.

Monday, February 3rd - Song of Solomon 6: 1-3

Our Christ never sits still like a pretty statue. He is living and on the move. His movements are never away from His bride, though for certain testing seasons they may seem to be so. Try to imagine Him, as did the bride here in her dream, absent from your life. How well could you describe from memory the character and career of this Jesus, the Lover of your soul?

Tuesday, February 4th - Song of Solomon 6: 3

At last the bride comes to a properly restored sense of priority. She realizes in a more deep, vital, and grateful way that she belongs to her husband, who, in turn, belongs to her. His having come to her earlier, seeking access to her home and heart (v.2) is now seen to be no intrusion into the way she had chosen to spend her night. He is her way. The mutual propriety which love gives to this wife and her husband and the mutually loving regard in which they hold each other makes unwanted imposition by either upon the other impossible. We do well to remember this when Christ draws near to us at apparently inconvenient times and in apparently imposing ways.

Wednesday, February 5th - Song of Solomon 6: 3-9

As soon as the wife comes to her senses (v.3), her loving husband is reunited with her (vv.4-9). Though she searched for him after she had foolishly spurned him, she did not find him so much as he found her. His return to her came not coincidentally as her loving appreciation for him was restored, but, instead, her purified and strengthened love for him served to summon him to her. We shall always find our heavenly Solomon--or, rather be found afresh by Him--when we search for Him with all of our heart (Jer. 29:13,14).

Thursday, February 6th - Song of Solomon 6: 4-9

Solomon does not scold his wife for her having previously spurned him, or for her having thought or dreamed uncaring and unworthy things of him. He simply professes afresh his love for her by his declaring the affectionate and respectful regard in which he holds her. When our hearts return fully to Christ, the Lover of our souls, we shall never find that His heart has grown less loving and committed toward us.

Friday, February 7th - Song of Solomon 6: 4

As we found earlier (4:1ff), so here we find a description of the bride. Solomon describes her neither as she appears to the world, nor as she appears to herself, but rather as she is beheld in his own loving eyes. He likens her to cities and to an army--both images representing that which is precious and powerful in a king's

realm. We are somewhat familiar with Jerusalem and the beauty, strength, and glory of that capital city of the covenant nation. The beauty of Jerusalem results from a spiritual reality, namely, that in Zion God chose to cause His glorious name to dwell. Tirzah was a city north of Jerusalem. Its name means pleasantness or sweetness. For Solomon to compare his bride to such pleasant and glorious cities, wherein one could dwell, making a pleasant living, and where a king could reign, is highest praise. The bride of Christ is likened to the new Jerusalem, wherein the God of glory dwells (Eph. 2:19-22; Phil. 3:20; Rev. 21, 22).

Saturday, February 8th - Song of Solomon 6: 4

Solomon likens the beauty of his wife to an army with banners. At first, this image may seem unfit, for we may not think of such an army as being particularly attractive. Yet, he may be referring to her awesome and conquering beauty, which results not merely from loveliness of physical form, but even more so from virtuous character. No man is awestruck by a woman who is physically attractive but spiritually vacant. There is an awesome potency to spiritual beauty which, like a great army, subdues all in its path. The grace of God has so beautified the Church that her beauty captures the heart of her King.

Sunday, February 9th - Song of Solomon 6: 5

The awesome power of the bride's beauty is stressed further in this verse. Solomon describes the effect her eyes have on him. Her loving and inviting gaze, when fixed on him, makes his head swim! He professes himself completely captivated by her, and there is no doubt that he enjoys it immensely. He does not really want her to turn her eyes away from him. Can it be that the bride of Christ affects her Lord in this way? We would dare not think it if He did not tell us so in His Word.

Monday, February 10th - Song of Solomon 6: 5-7

Solomon, in these verses, virtually repeats what he had previously said to his bride in 4:1-3. What is the significance of such a repetition? Some may see it as betraying a flaw in this poem, or, even worse, a flaw in Solomon's love for his bride, as though he had grown complacent and so wearied of conceiving new images through which to extol her. However, repetition need not be vain and stale. It can bespeak reinforcement of the original sentiment. As such, the repeated images are renewed, expressing afresh and with even greater depth what had first been uttered. This way of understanding the repetition appears the correct one when we recall that the bride had just experienced her own lapse into complacency respecting her husband. Yet he reassures her that his love for her remains unmarred by her lapse. His love for her never changes, never grows stale, is ever stable, yet grows ever fresher, deeper, stronger. How thankful we should be for the unchangeable nature of our heavenly Solomon's love for us.

Tuesday, February 11th - Song of Solomon 6: 5-7

True love need not always be expressed in new and exciting ways. When love is true, a blessed familiarity grows, which breeds not contempt, but increasing mutual respect and appreciation. Novelty in love is appropriate in its initial stages; but a continued craving by either party for novelty in a love which should be maturing indicates a superficiality which should be outgrown. While the mercies of the Lord are new and fresh every day, it is also true that there is fundamentally an unchangeable dimension to His love for us. Such immutability is a fruit of the perfection of His love.

Wednesday, February 12th - Song of Solomon 6: 8, 9

In v. 8, Solomon may be referring to queens and concubines of other kings, or he may be candidly alluding to his own notorious polygamy. If the latter be the case, then we see plainly the human, frail, and fallen element in this earthly king who is a type of the heavenly King. At certain points in this poem the imperfections of the shadow, or type, show clearly. Yet, while we cannot endorse the polygamy of Solomon, if that is what is referred to here, we still see something true and valuable. We see that the wife

celebrated in this poem is incomparable. She rises above all others who would vie for the king's attention. And the king sees her as being the center not only of his attention, but also of the attention of all others. It is as though she were her mother's only child, with parental affection having been lavished on her, while the maidens, queens, and concubines--far from being jealous of her--admit to her blessedness and praise her. This wife may not view herself in this singular way, but her loving husband sees her thusly.

Thursday, February 13th - Song of Solomon 6: 8, 9

The bride of Christ may view herself as one among countless of her Lord's concerns. However, we shall see one day what we may now only grasp by faith, namely, that the Church has always been and always shall be the center of God's affection and attention. And as every knee shall one day bow in recognition of the sovereign glory of Christ, so every tongue will confess not only His lordship, but also the blessedness and loveliness of His bride.

Friday, February 14th - Song of Solomon 6: 8, 9

Earlier in this poem (1:5,6), the bride sensed her inferiority and felt herself an object of ridicule amidst Solomon's harem. Now even those women have been won over to sing this bride's praises. What has made the difference? It is that they begin to see in her what Solomon sees in her. They begin to see beauty and all manner of excellence in her because Solomon sees such virtues in her. The love of Solomon has drawn such virtues out of his bride to be seen by others. The love of our heavenly Solomon implants such virtues in His bride, then nurtures them to full fruition until all the world is obliged to confess her loveliness.

Saturday, February 15th - Song of Solomon 6: 10

In this verse other women begin to extol the bride using images which we have seen employed by her loving and ceaselessly admiring husband. They, too, have been conquered by her beauty, referring to her as an army with banners, just as her husband had referred to her in v.4. The love of Christ for His bride makes her lovely in the eyes of all.

Sunday, February 16th - Song of Solomon 6: 11-12

It is not clear who is speaking in these verses, and scholars cannot come to agreement on the point. If Solomon is speaking, he appears to be saying that he looks to see fruit of his love in his wife. His approach to a bride so inherently unworthy and conscious of it (1:5,6) would necessitate his condescension. Yet, he would stoop, not to stay on her level, but to raise her up to his own royal station. Thus, these verses may represent the grace of our heavenly Solomon, lifting up His bride to His glory.

Monday, February 17th - Song of Solomon 6: 11, 12

These words may not be Solomon's, but may be those of his wife. If so, we see how her thoughts here turn to natural things. The love of her husband has made her content with simple things of this life. Yet, by her marriage, she has been exalted to royal status. She did not seek such exaltation, nor did she ever dream that she was worthy of it. Hence, she expresses an element of surprise when she finds herself so exalted. However, far from her looking out of place in a ruling station, regality appears tailor made for her. Her loving soul engaged her to the royal person and position of the king. She evidently would have loved him had he been a peasant. But he is the king. Thus, she marvels that her love--that which most deeply delighted her heart and soul--should also serve to raise her to royal station. Here is Mt. 6:33 raised to the infinite power!

Tuesday, February 18th - Song of Solomon 6: 13

In this verse, the bride who is called Shulammitte, has apparently withdrawn. The chorus, or perhaps the maidens, queens, and concubines (v.9) call after her. Why should the bride withdraw at this point? Perhaps she became overly conscious of the responsibilities inherent in her royal position. This sort of thing happens to believers when they, having made a commitment to Christ, then become aware of the costly sacrifice and wish they could flee from their high calling. Perhaps thoughts of her own unworthiness have returned to plague her. Believers in Christ can and do experience the blessed liberation of Christ's love and power, but then, without warning, become self-conscious again and sink, like Peter did, walking on the water with Jesus and suddenly becoming overwhelmed by his own weakness and vulnerability. Despite the depth, sincerity, and constancy of Christ's love, neither our hearts, nor our hands, nor our walks remain constant during our pilgrimage.

Wednesday, February 19th - Song of Solomon 6: 13

The feelings of inadequacy which prompt the bride to withdraw are not based on what is true. The four-fold cry of the chorus or the queen and concubines indicates that there is nothing at all in her which would warrant her hiding herself and her light under a basket. Nor do these onlookers desire simply to satisfy unholy curiosity by their gazing upon her. The reference to the dance of the two companies indicates how the onlookers beheld her. The Hebrew word for two companies, *mynxmh*, is found in Gen. 32:1ff, where Jacob, on his return to meet Esau--whom he had cheated, and from whom he had fearfully fled--was met by angels sent by God to protect Jacob's camps. This great event later became stylized and celebrated in a dance in Israel. The dance commemorated the grace and delivering power of God. It is the bride of Solomon, as a joyful trophy of divine redeeming grace and power, that the onlookers desire to see. Let the world see the light of Christ's grace and delivering power shining forth from His people!

Thursday, February 20th - Song of Solomon 6: 13

The Shulammitte asks with incredulity whether the onlookers really see in her something of the grace and power of God. But such grace and power was precisely what they did see in her, and they wanted to see more of it. We must not let false modesty obscure the light of Christ shining through our lives.

Friday, February 21st - Song of Solomon 7: 1-5

From the verse preceding this passage we gathered that the bride had withdrawn from those who were admiring her. In this passage we gather that she heeded the imploring cries of her admirers and returned. Thus, yet another detailed description of her beauty is given in these verses. She is described in admittedly sensual imagery from her feet to her head. In 5:10-16 the bride gave a similar description of her husband, there beginning with his head and working down to his feet. Perhaps the most instructive thing to note in the current passage is that this admiring portrayal is drawn not by the king, who is mentioned in the third person in v.5, but by a wider circle. Not only does the king, her loving husband, see her as being beautiful, precious, and gracious, but her chaste charms have affected others, drawing admiration from them--some of whom, we may understand from 6:9, were her natural competitors. The beauty of the love of God for and from the bride of Christ not only captivates the King of glory; it compels the admiration of the world.

Saturday, February 22nd - Song of Solomon 7: 1

The admirers remark on the beauty of Shulammitte's feet and the nobility of her character. She is declared to be of noble birth (prince's daughter) as well as rank (now a queen). But there is no indication that she was, in fact, of noble birth. The opposite impression is gathered by such verses as 1:5,6. Yet she has been so transformed by the king's love for her and by her love for him that to all onlookers she has always been noble. The gracious

condescension of our heavenly Solomon, and the sanctifying work of His Holy Spirit make poor sinners not only to be adopted children by status, but makes them appear always to have been children of royalty (1 Jn. 3:1,2). Nor does the walk of the child of God do anything to undermine such dignity. Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace fit beautifully a noble heritage and rank (Is. 52:7; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15).

Sunday, February 23rd - Song of Solomon 7: 1

The noble rank and the dignifying stand and walk of the believer in Christ are commented on by Hannah in her prayerful song of thanksgiving to God for Samuel: "He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with nobles, and inherit a seat of honor...He keeps the feet of His Godly ones ..." (1 Sam. 2:8,9). Divine grace erases all trace of the dust and ash heap, enabling one to stand and to walk with the alacrity of the Lord (Jude 24).

Monday, February 24th - Song of Solomon 7: 1

If the feet of the Shulammitte are said to be beautiful, the rest of her is said to be even more beautiful. Thus, the focus rises from the lowliest members of the body, which are in contact with the dusty earth, to that part of the anatomy which joins the feet and the legs to the rest of the body. But the hips are not noted to be simply functionally capable; they are said to be as beautiful in form and precious in substance as jewelry. We are not to understand that Solomon's wife exposes to open view such intimate parts of herself, as the drunken King Ahasuerus sought to do with his Queen Vashti (Esth. 1:10,11). But, rather, that however chastely she acts and modestly she dresses, the wife of Solomon's essential beauty shines through. Likewise do the hidden beauties of holiness in the bride of Christ shine forth (1 Pet. 3:3,4).

Tuesday, February 25th - Song of Solomon 7: 2,3

In these verses even more intimate parts of the Shulammitte's body are perceived and portrayed as being beautiful and precious. Though the imagery is sensual, the application is surely not to be sensuous. We should bear in mind that within the poem's structure, Solomon's wife is being admired not as a sexual object, but rather is extolled by women as a woman most beautiful in every apparent and hidden aspect of her being.

Wednesday, February 26th - Song of Solomon 7: 2

Anatomically, the navel is significant as marking both the place from which the infant in the womb drew its nourishment, and the approximate center point of the human body in life after birth. Here the navel is said to be a beautiful container of mixed wine. In other words, the central aspect of her being is no longer something solely receiving, but now contains the beverage of joy for others. Similarly, the belly is conceived of not as a digestive repository, but as a feeding source of beautiful form. Solomon's love had transformed his wife from a needy receiver to being one who rendered nourishment and joy inspiring refreshment to others. The love of our heavenly Solomon similarly transforms us (Phil. 2:3,4).

Thursday, February 27th - Song of Solomon 7: 3

Once again, as in 4:5, that intimate part of the anatomy peculiar to women is noted. This

part of the body is designed to give food, yet the image says nothing of such a function. It only comments on the beauty of the form of that part of the Shulammitte. We find striking beauty practically overpowering functionality in other Scriptural descriptions of the bride of Christ. Read about such impractical but beautiful things as the jasper walls, pearl gates, and golden streets of the bride, the wife of the Lamb of God, in Rev. 21.

Friday, February 28th - Song of Solomon 7: 4

The neck of Solomon's spouse is said to be like an ivory tower--slender, white, and captivating. That which upholds and turns her head is thus described as being strong and beautiful. Her eyes are likened to pools located in a rather dry region of the land. Hence, as such pools, with their clear, rippling waters, would delight and slake the thirst of those dwelling near them, her loving eyes are said to convey refreshment and delight to those looking into them. Her nose is likened to a specific tower, the tower of Lebanon, which faces the capital city of one of Israel's near neighbors, Syria, which was at times an enemy to Israel. Thus, her nose is declared to be straight, symmetrical, and dignified, imparting awe-inspiring beauty to her face. Such details of her face are noted in most appreciative detail, for her beauty is seen by these onlookers not in spite of her defects, but because of her overwhelming perfections. Likewise is the bride of Christ regarded, not only by her heavenly husband, but by all of creation as well.

Saturday, March 1st - Song of Solomon 7: 5

Even more than for its topographical prominence, Carmel is notable as being the place of righteous victory, whereupon Elijah confronted, defeated, and destroyed wicked Jezebel's prophets of Baal. Thus, these admirers are saying more than that Solomon's wife has a good head on her shoulders. She is being commended for her mind which mortifies sinful thoughts while nurturing and expressing righteous thoughts. Yet, the consistent victory of righteousness in her thinking does not issue in grimness, but in beauty. Accordingly, her dark, shining hair is said to captivate the king, not by the strength of its tresses, but by its loveliness. Righteousness never diminishes but ever enhances and empowers all other virtues one may possess--even that of physical beauty.

Sunday, March 2nd - Song of Solomon 7: 1-5

We may wonder what made Solomon's wife so attractive not only to the king, but also to others. The answer, surely, is that his love for her and hers for him had beautified her in every way. In 6:12 we read of the response of her soul to her royal lover, and how she had reached for him, attaining not only the desire of her soul, but a royal station as well. Such a transformation touched her character and her appearance. The love of our heavenly Solomon for us and our love for Him similarly transforms us. His divine love showered upon us and reflected from us has the effect of drawing others into its orbit and power...or should have such effect, if we rightly and truly receive and reflect such love.

Monday, March 3rd - Song of Solomon 7: 1-5

The wife of King Solomon was found to be attractive by others not because she sought to beautify herself in order to attract others. The single source of her beauty was her loving focus upon Solomon himself. Even so, the bride of Christ, in contemplating her great commission to evangelize the nations, can only effectively draw others into her

membership not by trying to please those others, but by her faithful and loving devotion to her Lord. We can concentrate too much and too directly on the lost, devising witnessing techniques and social programs which may tickle men's fancy but never draw them to have loving admiration for either the body of Christ or its Head; or we may think we evangelize by our setting out stark gospel facts, rather than our shining with the attractive beauty of gospel holiness. Such holiness becomes ours not as we concentrate upon ourselves or others, but only as we set our hearts, souls, strength, and minds upon Christ alone.

Tuesday, March 4th - Song of Solomon 7: 6

Once again Solomon speaks, extolling his lovely wife. He seems never to tire of celebrating the beautiful facets of her being. This verse is perhaps best translated: "How beautiful and delightful you are, love is in your charms." Thus he appears to be saying that her crowning delight is not her beauty, but rather her love for him. He delights in her loving willingness and longing to mingle their lives together, as the one life gives itself to the other and thereby finds the compliment and completion of itself. Accordingly, the self-giving of love becomes a self-enrichment. No wonder, then, that the Apostle Paul declares love to be the greatest of great virtues (1 Cor. 13:13).

Wednesday, March 5th - Song of Solomon 7: 7-9a

Solomon employs yet another poetic image through which to portray his lovingly admiring assessment of his wife. He declares her to be upright, beautiful, and bountiful in fruit. This image, as with earlier ones, is unashamedly sensual. There is, of course, nothing wrong with appreciation of the physical aspect of love within the blessed confines of holy matrimony. However, it is not only, or even primarily, a physical attraction which Solomon experiences. He hungers to hold and feed upon the delights of her physical form not because he has an obsession with her physical features, but rather because he loves her. Therefore, he desires even her outer traces because he loves her inner essence.

Thursday, March 6th - Song of Solomon 7: 7-9a

With chaste observation it should be noted that Solomon longs to caress his wife's breasts not so much because they are breasts, but because they are hers, they being outward expressions of her essentially fruitful and nourishing character. Such distinction and priority are what separates Godly love from sinful lust. Scripture enjoins men to possess their own wives in sanctification and honor, not in ungodly, lustful passion (1 Thess. 4:4,5). It is when sex is severed from love, and made a mere physical or mechanical activity, that it becomes not only less than God intended it to be, but positively sinful and corrupting.

Friday, March 7th - Song of Solomon 7: 7-9a

Solomon poetically represents himself taking hold of his wife's breasts, whereby he feeds upon the delightful nourishment of her heart and soul. The image then ascends to her nose, from which she exhales not exhausted air, but sweetest and most delightfully invigorating fragrance and richly fermented beverage. Clearly the image is a monstrosity if taken literally. However, poetically understood it is a most beautiful reference to her

soul, with which Scripture often associates the breath (Gen. 2:7; 7:22; Job 27:3). A Godly man desires intimately to touch and to be touched by the physical form of his wife because through it are mediated the sweet and loving exercises of her soul. The Son of God delights in the outer form of His bride, namely, her uprightness and fruitful deeds, because these issue from regenerate hearts and minds.

Saturday, March 8th - Song of Solomon 7: 9

The king has been extolling the beauties and virtues of his wife and declaring his determination to partake of the delightful fruits of her love. Suddenly, in the middle of this verse, the wife speaks. We can hardly call her words an interruption, for they are an inviting echo of his desire. He wants to have loving communion with her, and she wants him to have his way with her. When a husband so loves his wife, she lovingly submits to his desire (Eph. 5:22ff).

Sunday, March 9th - Song of Solomon 7: 9

The wife's desire is that her husband possess her according to his holy, loving desire, with no resistance being offered. The bride of Christ should embrace the mind of Christ in similar fashion, not only apprehending the righteous and affectionate will of her Savior, but submitting utterly to His holy and loving desires. The grace and love of God give believers new hearts whereby they cry in response to their Lord's declaration of His coming for them: Amen, come, Lord Jesus. (Rev. 22:20).

Monday, March 10th - Song of Solomon 7: 9

Solomon's wife desires and delights to give herself to the loving desire of her husband to possess her. Such desire on her part does away with any resistance to his enjoying that for which he longs. This complete absence of resistance on her part is referred to by her desire that ripe fruit of her being go smoothly into the affectionate caress of her beloved, flowing so gently that even were his desire not strong, but sleeping, she would still gain access into his embrace. There is another interesting way in which the final part of this verse may be read, namely: "It makes the lips of sleepers move." Taken that way, she is desiring both to facilitate her beloved's possession of her and to experience enduring effects of such mutual inter-penetration of their beings.

Tuesday, March 11th - Song of Solomon 7: 10

It is the mutual commitment of love which distinguishes the holy and ecstatic embrace from the confining and corrupting hold of lust. In the former, the only thing which comes close to being greater than the other's desire to have one, is one's own desire to give oneself to the other. In the latter, one desires the hollow satisfaction forcefully to take, with greater emotional if not physical force, what the other refuses to yield. Because our heavenly Solomon so loves us, we love Him, and delight to give ourselves utterly to His holy desire to have us.

Wednesday, March 12th - Song of Solomon 7: 11-13

Solomon's wife offers him an intriguing invitation in these verses. While she may rightly exult in the glories of the court and the admiration of the citizens of the capital city, she retains a fondness for the simple, rural life she had lived prior to her engagement to

Solomon. We need read nothing negative into this expressed fondness, as though she were reluctant to grow in her new station, bearing therein greater responsibilities. Instead, hers is a loving desire to share with him all that has made her what she is. However misguided and unnecessary such a desire may be, it springs not from selfishness nor from insecurity, but from love and growth in security of her beloved's love for her.

Thursday, March 13th - Song of Solomon 7: 11-13

Do we not, like so many children in understanding, grow fond of our past as the grace and love of our heavenly Solomon make us to be at peace with it all? And is it not a common longing we have to retreat to the familiar, there to stand with Christ, and there lovingly and fruitfully to serve Him? Our Jesus does no more despise such immature expressions of love than would a father despise the technically inept pictures lovingly drawn by his child as a gift for that father. Yet, we shall learn as our pilgrimage proceeds, and know perfectly at its glorious end, that it is among the fruits of the new heaven and earth, not the old, wherein we best give and receive love with our heavenly Husband.

Friday, March 14th - Song of Solomon 8: 1,2

The wife of Solomon develops further in these verses her desire to retreat with him to her home territory. She longs to share all of herself with him, including her upbringing. She wishes, perhaps dreamily, that they had grown up together, having enjoyed the equal and affectionate relationship of siblings. In such a relationship she could have expressed her love to him with a propriety not possible for two young ones outside of that relationship. In this, her longing is similar to that which he expressed in 4:9ff. However, that which is the wishful thinking of love between Solomon and his bride is more than that between Christ and His bride. Read Jer. 1:5 and Eph. 1:3-6 to see how, in a very real sense, Christ has lovingly been with His saints from earlier than the earliest days of their lives.

Saturday, March 15th - Song of Solomon 8: 1,2

It is significant that Solomon's desire to have grown up with his wife (4:9ff) preceded that same desire in his wife. It is not so significant for these types as for the substance of Christ and His bride. For whereas the types can but wishfully think of such retroactive association, Christ, by His pre-existence and the eternal divine decree, has been a brother to and, indeed, a sacrifice for His people from the foundation of the world. We love Him because He first loved us, His loving having preceded ours not only in time, but in eternity.

Sunday, March 16th - Song of Solomon 8: 1,2

The desire which Solomon's wife has to have known and loved him from her earliest years is, as stated in these verses, a desire to have given herself utterly to him and no other. She knows, however chaste and pure she was coming into her marriage, that there were deeds of kindness she did and expressions of love she either gave to others, or, for lack of a proper object, kept to herself. All of this she would have lavished ever, only, and always on him. So it is with members of the body and bride of Christ. We look back on years spent in vanity and pride and would have them somehow redeemed for the Savior we have come to know and love. We wish we could have known Christ sooner, and could have been committed to Him at our earliest consciousness. But Christ knows

best how to stimulate, purify, and receive our love. As C. S. Lewis has somewhere written, the longer we are in Christ, the more we become aware that He was lovingly with us for all of our lives. Nothing is lost in Christ; not who we are now; not who we have been in the past. Only sin is removed.

Monday, March 17th - Song of Solomon 8: 3,4

The desire of the wife of Solomon is that he have her, hold her, and love her as she actually is and with all of her aspirations. The chorus, or daughters of Jerusalem, may be tempted to tell her that she need not think wistfully of her past without him, but Solomon silences them, for he alone can and will show her all she needs to know about his love for her as well as her love for him. Similarly, with our heavenly Solomon, it is not so much what others tell us and try to teach us about His love, but our own experience of His love that awakens us to all that we need to know of and do for Him.

Tuesday, March 18th - Song of Solomon 8: 5

Whatever the wife of Solomon may wish about the romantic redemption of her past, the present reality of her beloved husband is at hand. The two are in this verse pictured as one, moving, progressing, not back in time, as she wished, but upward and onward. They progress not from a city to her home village, but, rather, with every step they emerge from this world as it has become by sin--a wilderness. Christ ever leads His bride out of this cursed and dying world and into the splendor of the glorious place He has prepared for us (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Jn. 14: 2,3).

Wednesday, March 19th - Song of Solomon 8: 5

We all sense tension between what we have experienced prior to our conversion to Christ, and where we are being henceforth led by Christ. We rejoice in our new, justified status and in the sure hope of glory. Yet, we long for a reconciliation between what we are becoming and where we are headed in redemption and what we were and what we experienced even as unconverted creatures of God in this world. Not everything we experienced in our pre-conversion days is easily or even rightly to be despised. The reconciliation of this tension--the harmony between what we were and who we now are and who we yet shall be--is not achieved by our going back to relive our lives with the Lord, but rather by our leaning upon Him as He leads us forward.

Thursday, March 20th - Song of Solomon 8: 5

Solomon's wife is pictured as leaning upon him. There are two senses in which such leaning should be understood. First, she, being the weaker vessel, leans necessarily upon him for strength, protection, and provision. Then, she leans voluntarily upon him in love. Certainly both senses are true in the believer's leaning upon Christ. He is our rock, our fortress, and our strong deliverer upon whom we must cast ourselves utterly by faith. Yet, He is also the lover of our souls, upon whom we delight to rest, and in whom we find our satisfaction and security.

Friday, March 21st - Song of Solomon 8: 5

The words in the second half of this verse are Solomon's. He is telling his wife that she did not find him, but that he sought and found her, and that he awakened her by his love.

One cannot resist thinking of the encounter between Jesus and Nathanael, wherein Jesus told that Israelite in whom was no guile: "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Here Solomon tells his wife that he had knowledge of her prior to her existence, and that he had loved her all of her life. Our heavenly Solomon, through these words, informs us that He has known and loved us prior to either our generation or regeneration. In creation, He awakened us from non-existence; then, in redemption, He awakened us from the living death of our sinfulness.

Saturday, March 22nd - Song of Solomon 8: 5

The existence of Solomon prior to that of his beloved's with the dependence she has upon him for her life and love, and all that this points to with respect to Christ's electing love for and effectual calling of His people, is vividly, if somewhat more negatively, set out in Ezek. 16. It is a blessed and necessary truth for us to realize that our welfare and the success and fruitfulness of our service for the Lord depend not upon our knowledge and grasp of Him, but rather upon His caring and empowering embrace of us.

Sunday, March 23rd - Song of Solomon 8: 5, 6

Solomon assures his wife that he has lovingly been with her all of her life. While it is possible that Solomon attended her birth, it is unlikely that he did so. Thus, he speaks poetically of the retroactive power of his love. But with respect to our heavenly Solomon, who is the substance of which this earthly king is but the shadow, it is quite true that He loved us even prior to our birth (Eph. 1:3-6). The knowledge that we have been so elected by the sovereign and loving choice of the Lord not only should breed assurance and blessed security in us, but also calls for our total commitment. Therefore, the wife is urged lovingly to embrace her husband, placing him as a seal over her heart and arm. When we consciously apply Christ as such a seal to our lives, both our pleasure and our protection increase.

Monday, March 24th - Song of Solomon 8: 6

A seal does numerous things. It preserves from contamination and corruption, it protects from invasion, and it indicates legitimate ownership. By his loving commitment, Solomon gives himself as all of these things to his wife, and he urges her, by her lovingly committed response, to accept him as such. In the same way, believers are told to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, making no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). When we so seal ourselves in Christ, we experience manifold blessing.

Tuesday, March 25th - Song of Solomon 8: 6

We are to place Christ, our heavenly husband, as a seal over our hearts and on our arms. The heart represents our inner life--our thoughts, emotions, wills--while the arm signifies the actions issuing from the heart. Thus we are to apply Christ to our entire lives. He is to be the transforming treasure of our thoughts, and to Him and His love for us should our words and actions testify.

Wednesday, March 26th - Song of Solomon 8: 6

We may wonder how, in practical terms, we are to apply Christ as a seal to our lives. Ultimately, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, the other Comforter whom Christ has sent (Eph. 1:13,14). Yet, the Holy Spirit operates instrumentally, sealing us by the application of the Word of God to our lives (Col. 3:16), by His empowering us to work out fruitful deeds of our salvation (Phil. 2:12, 13; 1 Jn. 3:18, 19), and by the peace of God which guards us (Phil. 4: 6, 7). The sealing we are to apply is manifold in its administration, singular in its source.

Thursday, March 27th - Song of Solomon 8: 6

It is instructive to note that whereas Scripture speaks of wives being for their husbands helpers (Gen. 2:18), husbands are called and equipped by God to exercise a sealing ministry for their wives (Eph. 5:25-33). The marriage arrangement is not an equal partnership. Each partner has distinct needs and responsibilities. Husbands are to love their wives, and by that love, to preserve and purify them. Christian wives may sensitize their husbands to many wonderful things, but it is their husbands who serve to protect them from the evils of the world.

Friday, March 28th - Song of Solomon 8: 6

The wife's seal is her husband's love. She thus applies for her protection one who is lovingly desirous to provide such protection. Hence, the offer and application of this seal is a matter not mechanical but affectionate. Solomon declares his love to be strong and inexorable, like death, which is never refused. Or, Solomon may be saying that his love is strong enough to meet the supreme challenge of death. The love of our heavenly Solomon is stronger than death, so strong that He willingly submitted to death and vanquished it for us. Greater love has no man.

Saturday, March 29th - Song of Solomon 8: 6

Solomon declares his love to be jealous. He will have the object of his love and cleave to her as surely and absolutely as the grave will claim all of the living. Once again, however, the love of our divine Bridegroom is literally stronger than this poetic image. He endured death, the grave, and hell, and triumphed over them all because He loved us and would take us to Himself as His bride.

Sunday, March 30th - Song of Solomon 8: 6

Solomon employs fire as a third image to describe the character of his love for his wife. Fire is consuming and purifying. He is describing more than a strong possessive passion. He declares his to be a holy love when he likens it to the flame of the Lord. With this mention of the Lord (the only mention of God in the whole poem), Solomon explicitly points beyond himself to the love and sealing power of One greater than himself. Christ is the true husband, the true seal, the true king, the true lover of His people.

Monday, March 31st - Song of Solomon 8: 6, 7

The wife is told to put on her husband like a seal. The words remind us of similar imperatives found throughout Scripture, exhorting the believer to put on Christ (Rom. 13:14), to put on a heart of compassion (Col. 3:12), and to put on the armor of God (Eph. 6:11). Such commanding exhortations leave us no option. The authority and the love of

the Son of God form the basis of such directives, and the threatening and destructive powers surrounding us--such as death, hell, and floods of evil enticements and intimidations--make quite clear the vital necessity of our compliance with such imperatives to apply divine protection.

Tuesday, April 1st - Song of Solomon 8: 6, 7

The image of the seal speaks of categorical separation from evils and absolute preservation in and for the Lord. Ultimately, God will have all of us or none of us, as we shall have all of Him or none of Him. The reason why believers hesitate to put Christ as a seal over their attitudes and actions is because they do not see rightly the evils and dangers to which they are exposed without Him, nor the inconceivable blessing they will enjoy in Christ. The sooner and more clearly we see our true plight and His true provision, the sooner and more vitally we shall obey this imperative to seal ourselves in Christ and His love, which love is not smothering, but saving and blessedly and invigoratingly satisfying.

Wednesday, April 2nd - Song of Solomon 8: 7

Solomon declares that love transcends all powers and all possessions in creation. Nothing in this world can purchase love; nor can anything in this world destroy love. For love is not of this world. We love because God, who is love, first loved us and filled our hearts with His love. Such love God gave to us and demonstrated for us in Christ. It is an infinitely precious love, immeasurably beyond the total purchasing power of creation. It is an indestructible gift, which, though it will be assailed by waves of trials, afflictions, and persecutions, cannot be quenched. In all things of creation, including unseen swarms of evil hosts, we are more than conquerors through the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39).

Thursday, April 3rd - Song of Solomon 8: 8, 9

As with certain other places in this poem, so here it is difficult to determine just who is speaking. It could be the wife of Solomon, who, having received his love and having given herself utterly to him in love now recalls with clear and loving concern her other relations. When we rightly love our heavenly Solomon with all of our heart and soul, He directs and enables us to exercise holy and helpful compassion for others.

Friday, April 4th - Song of Solomon 8: 8

The speaker in this verse need not be the wife of Solomon. It may be the chorus, representing others who bring their concerns before the king for his wise and gracious dispositions. The speaker is not as important as the subject. The little sister represents undeveloped character. The question concerns how she may be nurtured rightly so that she may be presented appropriately to the man who will ask her hand in marriage. Here a loving and responsible concern for those growing through formative years is expressed. Their growth and development is not something which takes place automatically. They can be harmed by abuse and neglect, or helped by loving nurture. As we mature in Christ we become aware of our responsibility to provide the less mature with necessary nourishment and cultivating care. Read of the Apostle Paul's concern for this in Col. 1:28.

Saturday, April 5th - Song of Solomon 8: 8, 9

The nurture given depends upon the unique character and needs of the one being nurtured. Children do not mature mechanically, nor do spiritual babes all develop in the same way and at identical rates. Surely part of the teaching of such parables as the talents and the sower with the four soils makes this lesson clear. Christ sees us, loves us, and nurtures us as differing individuals (see His varying messages to the seven churches in Rev. 2, 3). We do well to remember this, lest we injuriously compare our experience with that of others, making ours, or even theirs, the standard for all.

Sunday, April 6th - Song of Solomon 8: 8, 9

In our administering the nurture and discipline of the Lord to the immature--whether they be our natural or spiritual children--we must match the nurture to their need. The little one is conceived here as having potential character which will manifest itself in a distinctive way, calling for nurture appropriate to that distinctiveness. She may show herself to be a wall or a door, and the nurture applied is quite different in each case. Here is a call to know well the character as well as condition of the lambs under our care, and to know the proper divine provision to apply to their particular needs.

Monday, April 7th - Song of Solomon 8: 8, 9

The little sister's development is anticipated to be as potentially different as a wall is from a door. Yet, there is appropriate nurture available for each contingency. A wall implies strength and resistance to invasion. Character which is strongly resistant to evil and temptation may be safely adorned with attractive elements. However, a door, which implies easy accessibility, must be barricaded to prevent invasion. A barricade is not as attractive and desirable as a battlement of silver, but it is preferable to allowing evil invasions to destroy the life of the young one. The weaker the character, the stronger and more restrictive the nurture should be. The immature do well to bear in mind that when the Lord's providence seems restrictive in their lives, it is for their preservation from evil encroachment and destruction.

Tuesday, April 8th - Song of Solomon 8: 8, 9

These verses may not refer only to the development of two separate characters. They may also refer to varying phases within the development of one life. Thus, the little sister may at times be a wall. She may evidence strength of commitment to the Lord. Then it is right to apply the more precious and desirable elements of nurture to her, such as allowing her greater freedom, entrusting her with greater responsibility, and so forth. But then, when she displays a too great gullibility and too weak power of discernment and holy discrimination, the nurture administered should be the strong, grim, but necessary imposition of restriction. The point of it all is that an immature soul in formative years will one day be ripened for a life's partner, or ruined for one. The young, but especially their elders nurturing them, do well ever to keep that day in sight and let all in the meantime be determined by that day, not by the tremors leading up to that day.

Wednesday, April 9th - Song of Solomon 8: 10

The wife of Solomon here testifies to her own character development. She has become exceedingly attractive and she is aware of it. Yet her beauty, while it is prominent, is not

inviting to all comers. Somehow even her attractive physical form forbids unholy invasion, as strong towers protecting a fortress discourage attempts to invade. What is the protective quality in her beauty? Surely it is her holy character. Her commitment to her one legitimate love is so deep, strong, and outwardly evident, that she may safely cultivate her beauty for him while keeping it protected from all others. Such holy love, holy discrimination, and holy vigilance result from sanctifying nurture, not from natural development.

Thursday, April 10th - Song of Solomon 8: 10

To all who should not relate to her in the most intimate way, this woman's beauty towers in a forbidding way. But in the eyes of her husband, her one true, legitimate lover, she is not a tower of resistance, but willingly luxuriates in him, giving herself lovingly to him. She finds her peaceful security and contentment in his eyes. There is something of a play on words in this arrangement: The Shulammitte finds shalom (peace) in the eyes of Solomon. Believers find peace in the person and work of the One who is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, whose name means king of righteousness, and whose office was that of king of Salem (peace).

Friday, April 11th - Song of Solomon 8: 10

There is no need to offer resistance against one who is our peace. The wife of Solomon has resisted giving her heart to others so that she might save it to give without reservation to him. In similar way we should refuse to give our love and devotion to anyone except Christ. Even those nearest to us we should hate in comparison with our love for Him (Lk. 14:26). We must be at war with the world if we are to be at peace with Christ (1 Jn. 2: 15-17). Then, in Him and in His peace we shall be directed and empowered rightly to love others and to be peacemakers in the world.

Saturday, April 12th - Song of Solomon 8: 11, 12

In these verses, the wife of Solomon draws a contrast between how Solomon disposed of one of his vineyards and how she disposes of herself. Solomon rented out his vineyard, receiving payment from his tenant farmers, while the farmers lived on the excess produce and the income its sale provided. Such an arrangement was fair and agreeable to all parties, for all parties were simply looking to derive income from such a business arrangement. But the relation between Solomon and his wife was different. She did not rent her vineyard to him or to anyone else. She gave her vineyard, which is to say herself, totally to him. Such is the difference between neighborly and marital love; such is the difference between a relationship established on grounds of common grace and one based on saving grace.

Sunday, April 13th - Song of Solomon 8: 11, 12

While the wife of Solomon gives all of herself and all of her substance to her husband, she does not do so to the neglect and impoverishment of those who had nurtured her as a wall and who had helped to preserve and multiply her fruits of virtue and beauty so that she might, in due course, give herself to her husband. Thus, under the image of a thousand shekels given to Solomon and two hundred given to those who had nurtured her vineyard, she declares that she gives herself fully to Solomon, while giving her thanks

and appreciation to those who had kept her and cultivated her during her developing years. Those loving Christ with all their hearts will find their hearts empowered and directed to love others in appropriate ways.

Monday, April 14th - Song of Solomon 8: 11, 12

By her figuratively paying Solomon the thousand shekels, the Shulammitte treats Solomon as though he owns her vineyard, which of course, he does, since she has lovingly given herself and all that she has to him in marriage. However, by her further noting a figurative payment of two hundred shekels to those who have nurtured the fruit of her vineyard, she seems to be expressing her thankful appreciation to those such as her parents who kept her from harm and corruption, and who cultivated her character. And though not all of her natural relationships served happily so (cf., 1:6, which refers to her ill-treatment at the hands of her brothers), the end result has served to train her in godliness. We do well, while thanking Christ for all that He has made of us, to acknowledge our gratitude for the service which spiritual mentors have rendered us.

Tuesday, April 15th - Song of Solomon 8: 13

In this verse Solomon speaks for the last time. He addresses his wife as one who sits in the gardens, and whose companions listen for her voice. Yet he wants to be the first to hear her, ever, only, and always. Solomon, having repeatedly extolled the beauty and virtues of his wife throughout this poem, addresses her at last with mention of her environment. She sits in gardens, places of beauty and fruitfulness. She has, as it were, the waiting ear of the world. She is no longer despised, ignored, or rejected. She has triumphed over all things, yet not so as to be independent of him. Neither she nor he would ever want that. The glorious perfections of the bride of Christ similarly will make her the wonder of the universe. Yet she will never, even by the glory in her and around her, be distracted from her loving Lord. As Samuel Rutherford wrote: "The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear Bridegroom's face; I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace."

Wednesday, April 16th - Song of Solomon 8: 13

Solomon will ever be the center of his wife's life, just as she has become the center of his life. Our heavenly Solomon has so regarded His redeemed people with such loving singularity from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4,5), and will continue to do so throughout eternity. Of all the beautiful sounds of His creation, of heaven as well as of earth, of angelic voices lifted in perpetual praise, the Lord desires to hear nothing so much as the faithful prayers now and those perfected loving communications hereafter of His Church.

Thursday, April 17th - Song of Solomon 8: 13, 14

Solomon calls for his wife to speak; she answers, calling for him to come quickly to her. Their hearts and minds are in perfect, loving harmony. That which he desires is her delight. That which she desires is his delight. The world is in perfectly cultivated order (gardens), and even things such as the mountains, which we know only to be rugged and wild, are seen by this loving couple as beautified. The love between Solomon and his wife make them see the world as a beautiful place. The love of Christ for His bride and

her love for Him actually will re-make the world into an inconceivably beautiful place.

Friday, April 18th - Song of Solomon 8: 13, 14

Although Solomon and his bride are married, their love for each other does not grow stale and cold. As time together passes, they increase with longing for each other. Even on our pilgrimage through this world, we, the saints of God, find that we do not tire of the Lord, but rather find His loving mercies new every morning. Thus, in answer to Christ telling His Church that He comes quickly, the Church answers: "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22: 20).

Saturday, April 19th - Song of Solomon 8: 13, 14

Why should we, who have been lifted from the dregs of sin and degradation by the love of Christ, not desire that He ever and always come quickly to us? And why should He, whose redeeming love so beautifies His bride, not ceaselessly desire and delight to have her and hear her loving communications? When Christ becomes wholly ours, and when we become His perfectly in His glory, then will the new heaven and earth shine with glorious beauties; then shall all lands be fruitful gardens, all mountains fragrant with spices; then shall eternal bliss fill the lives of all creatures, but none so much as those who form His bride, those elected by His eternal love, re-created by His applied redemption, and resurrected to spend the never ending day of eternity with Him in His love and glory.

(the following notes were first published in August 1989)

Sunday, April 20th - John 4: 1-3

We learn here that the baptizing mentioned in 3:22ff was really done by the disciples of Jesus under His authority. Notice that when the servants of Christ wield the authority of Christ, the ire of evil men (and Satan behind them) is raised, not primarily against the servants, but against the Master Himself. The Pharisees were being aroused against Jesus on account of what His disciples were doing by His authority. In response, Jesus retreats from Judea to Galilee, for His hour had not yet come. Spiritual retreat is not the same as defeat. Jesus remains Lord of the situation, as v.1 notes, referring to Him as *the Lord*. There is a time to step forward, a time to stand fast, and a time to step backwards in the Lord's service. The vital thing is to know when to do which. The Lord, who knows, will tell us.

Monday, April 21st - John 4: 4

On one level, the exigencies of His retreat dictated the course Jesus took, which was through Samaria. However, on a higher level there was a divine necessity to His steps through such a semi-hostile region. This day He would lead a Samaritan woman to saving

faith, and, through her, plant seeds for a church in Samaria (vv.39-42). You find the same sort of fruitful retreat through Samaria in Acts 8. If we but follow our Savior, we shall find the dictates even of adverse circumstances serving for the glory of the Lord. We shall always accomplish more good by our retreating with Jesus through our Samaritans, than by our pressing ahead without Him.

Tuesday, April 22nd - John 4: 5, 6

The city of Sychar was probably a mile or two from Shechem, the significant Old Testament city (Gen. 12:6; 33:18-20; Josh. 24:1,32; 1 Kings 12:1, 25). The region is supposed to abound in springs, thus causing us to wonder why Jacob would have dug a well there. The commentator Hengstenberg supplies the likely answer: "This work is that of a man who, a stranger in the country, wished to live independently of the inhabitants to whom the springs belonged, and to leave a monument of his right of property in this soil and in this whole country." A concern deeper than mere physical thirst led Jacob to dig this well. Our concerns with deeper, spiritual things should lead us to be similarly peculiar.

Wednesday, April 23rd - John 4: 5, 6

We have in the note on Jesus' weariness a reference to his true humanity. Our great High Priest can sympathize with us in our weaknesses, for He, too, experienced life as a Man in this fallen, cursed world (Heb. 2:17,18; 4:14-16; 5:8,9). But the satisfying of mere physical deprivations was never His primary concern. Otherwise, He would have been Himself drinking, rather than sitting by Jacob's well, being weary, thirsty, and oppressed by the noon heat. Was Jesus drinking in something deeper at this point? Was He pondering how far this area near Shechem had fallen since Jacob's day, and how He would raise from such ruins living stones for His body, the Church, sustained by the living water of God's Holy Spirit?

Thursday, April 24th - John 4: 6, 7

It was the sixth hour (i.e., noon) when this Samaritan woman came to the well. She very likely had to come alone at that time, rather than at the more popular time of evening, because she no doubt was ostracized by the other women on account of her obviously impure character (vv. 18,28). Would Jesus have engaged her in conversation had she come to Him by night as had Nicodemus? The point to note is that providence had so ordered this meeting that even any possible appearance of compromise on the part of Jesus was precluded. The Lord arranges our ministerial opportunities, too, so that our service avoids even the appearance of evil.

Friday, April 25th - John 4: 7-9

Although the circumstances for their first meeting were suitably circumspect, Jesus shows that He had none of that fastidiousness which prompts men, purportedly in name of purity, to remain aloof from people of questionable character. Although some, including the woman herself, would think it improper for a Jewish man to initiate a conversation with a Samaritan woman, Jesus tactfully opens lines of communication with her. Charity chastely prevails over custom here.

Saturday, April 26th - John 4: 7

While physical thirst was not paramount in the mind of Jesus, it was prominent at this time of His weariness. For the woman, physical thirst was of utmost importance. Although the priority given the satisfaction of thirst differed for each--for one it was need, for the other desire--the physical water does form the point of common interest. And because Jesus is always natural and genuine, eschewing all artificial and manipulative techniques of evangelism, He begins at this point. Though He who created all streams shows great condescension in this, He is not patronizing the woman but rather showing true respect. He would appreciate her legitimate service, as He does ours, and as we should respect that of others.

Sunday, April 27th - John 4: 7-9

This woman was not created to prostitute her body, but rather to give her life to God in loving service. In this, she represents us all. When the God/Man asked for her service in this small and natural way, I feel certain that it struck a deep chord in her being. He was respectfully asking for something legitimate. She sensed, no doubt, how greatly He differed from all the other men in her life who had ill-used her. But note how quickly she raises doubts and obstacles to this service. When the Savior draws near sinners, Satan raises social, national, religious, and all other kinds of objections to keep sinners in his bitter thrall.

Monday, April 28th - John 4: 10

Sin not only alienates man from God and estranges him from his highest destiny, but it impedes our performance of the simplest deeds of human kindness. Sin was creating obstacles between this woman and her fulfillment of the request of Jesus. Thus Jesus raises her thoughts to a higher, spiritual level where He would do the giving and she the

receiving. There, if she would receive His gift, they could have not only unimpeded contact in mundane matters, but holy, intimate, spiritual communion.

Tuesday, April 29th - John 4: 10

To know Jesus is to know a giving Savior. He will never refuse any who ask for the gift of salvation. As the hymn says: "All the fitness he requireth /Is to feel your need of him; /This he gives you, This he gives you, This he gives you; /'Tis the Spirit's rising beam." If we have not, it is because we ask not of Him. And when we do ask of Him, let us realize that He shall ever give us more than we can ask or think.

Wednesday, April 30th - John 4: 11, 12

The woman, knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God, did not know anything about the gift of God or the Conveyor of that gift of salvation, namely Jesus. Thus she continues to perceive obstacles to what Jesus proposes because she wrongly conceives of the matter. Many of our fears and doubts and evasions of service to the Lord trace back to similar ignorance on our part.

Thursday, May 1st - John 4: 11, 12

Just as Nicodemus had done respecting the new birth, so here the woman puts a physical construction on the spiritual meaning of our Lord's words, making those words appear absurd. But why is Jesus so figurative and enigmatic in His expressions? It is because He speaks in a language which, while being clear enough to reason, is clearly reasonable only to those who have faith. Think of His use of the parables in this connection, wherein He reveals truth which is clearly apprehended by receptive children who have faith, while it is misconstrued by those wise in their own estimation.

Friday, May 2nd - John 4: 11, 12

On the one hand, this woman is intrigued by Jesus and she begins to find a respect forming for Him as we see by her use of the title, *Sir*. But then she asks a question which, according to Greek construction, expects a negative answer. She is confused. One minute her hopes rise; the next she endeavors to dash them herself. Sin makes us cynical. But Jesus can overcome both sin and cynicism.

Saturday, May 3rd - John 4: 11-14

This woman doubts that Jesus can provide a lesser good when, in fact, He offers a greater good. She thinks He refers to still water from a masonry well, whereas He promises living water--flowing, invigorating, and in endless supply--from a fountain or spring. The Greek words used in verses 11, 12, and 14 make this even more clear. But Jesus is not simply offering superior water. He offers ever satisfying and sustaining salvation through Himself by the Holy Spirit. Jesus always offers and provides above what we can ask or think.

Sunday, May 4th - John 4: 15

Recall that Jesus is retreating from Judea as He goes through Samaria. Yet He reaps in His retreat. In His conversation, too, He has retreated from the request for physical water, and goes on to concentrate on higher realities. The woman follows this retreat, and although she still conceives of what Jesus offers in too low terms, she is on her way to becoming a trophy of His grace.

Whether He retreats, advances, or stands still, if we follow Jesus we shall be led from lesser to greater provision. Wherever He leads, those who follow are in triumphal procession by His grace.

Monday, May 5th - John 4: 15-18

Although Jesus was leading on to higher considerations, the woman was stuck on lower things. Her conceptions regarding the words of Jesus were not only too limited, they were altogether erroneous. He was not promising her infinite physical water as a labor saving device, but rather a new nature, a new status before God, a glorious destiny. Yet her understanding was blocked, not because of intellectual limitations, but because of moral failure.

Guilt is a blinding power, which serves to pervert even the most powerful of intellects. Man's deepest need and truest thirst is for forgiveness. Godly conviction brings us to a sense of that need, not to kill us but to lead us to the fountain of living water and eternal life.

Tuesday, May 6th - John 4: 16-18

The shift in topics from water to husbands may seem abrupt and irrelevant. But our Lord ever addresses us at the point of our greatest and truest need. This woman not only

thirsted for water, but also thirsted for men. Even were she to have the former thirst satisfied, the latter and greater would remain. Jesus shows her this to help her understand what Augustine later said about God: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." In fact, hers was a God-sized thirst no man or number of men could fill.

Wednesday, May 7th - John 4: 19

Jesus had touched a moral nerve when He shifted the conversation from water to the woman's husbands. Her full attention had thus been gained, and, from this point, Jesus no longer employs figurative language with her. He had demonstrated prophetic powers to her; she acknowledges that demonstration. No longer does she see Him as a Jewish man, incapable of drawing water from a well, and merely making fantastic promises. He is a prophet, yes, but more than a prophet, as she goes on to discover.

Most people do not really know us, and because we sense our unworthiness and moral failure we are not anxious to have them know us. But Jesus knows us completely. Realizing this we are sobered, our minds become focused, and anticipation rises in our hearts. What will He do with such knowledge?

Thursday, May 8th - John 4: 19-21

Her focus moves to religion, specifically to modes of worship. It is as though she reckons that if she could settle the matter of legitimate forms of worship she would reform her life. Do we worship in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim in Samaria? Perhaps there is some evasion at work here, such as we find when people say they will worship God when the Presbyterians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, and so on make it clear where they should attend church. But the vital issue lies deeper than form or location of public worship. It is a matter of one's personally knowing and delighting in God as Father through the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit. May this be ever our focus in worship and evangelism.

Friday, May 9th - John 4: 21

Notice how Jesus, while demonstrating perfect knowledge of this woman's sin and being far from making little of it, at the same time holds her in higher regard than she would hold herself. He commends her for her confession of sin in verses 17 and 18. Nor does He upbraid her for the erroneous, schismatic religion of her people, so much as He holds out hope by His saying, "...shall *you* worship the Father." He has come not to condemn,

but to save that which is lost. Let us neither be afraid nor ashamed to bring our ignorance and our sin to Him. He will patiently instruct (Jas. 1:5), and lovingly forgive (1 Jn. 1:9).

Saturday, May 10th - John 4: 22

The vital thing in worship is not outward form, but neither is such form a thing indifferent. The Samaritan religion was, in fact, schismatic, corrupt, deficient (1 Kings 12:26-33; 16:23-33). Through it no one could be saved. Whereas the Jews had the true oracles of God, "the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh..." (Rom. 9:4,5). Still, it all depends upon our relation to Christ. Salvation is not the possession of the Jews, but is from the Jews because Jesus, who is salvation, is from the Jews. If our full attention is on Christ, the true substance, then the form of our worship will be true, too.

Sunday, May 11th - John 4: 23, 24

The place of worship is not nearly so important as the object of worship and the state of heart of the worshippers. Salvation is to know the one, true, living God (Jn. 17:3), not according to man's imaginations, but as He truly is and has revealed Himself to be. This God is Spirit, immaterial, yet more substantial than material (Heb. 11:3). For us to worship Him in Spirit means that we do so from the heart, and in truth that we do so according to His revealed regulation. The Father seeks and saves such true worshippers through Christ (Heb. 2:10-13). And through Christ, by the Holy Spirit we not only know this mysterious and magnificent God, but we know Him as Father (Gal. 4:4-7).

Monday, May 12th - John 4: 25

When our consciousness is raised to contemplate the most sublime and vital issues of life--such as living water, sin and moral failure, the being and worship of God--we rightly perceive a great gulf fixed between ourselves and God. We perceive the need for a Mediator, a Redeemer, an Anointed Savior, a Messiah. We may long for Him, seek for Him, but He has initiated our quest through a quest of His own. The longing in the human heart for a Savior to come and settle all perplexity and fulfill all true need is not a vain one. He is always nearer to us in His coming than we suppose.

Tuesday, May 13th - John 4: 25, 26

The woman's heart is now focused in the right area, and there she perceives the One who supplies every answer and need of her soul. Indeed, here was One "greater than our father Jacob" (v.12). When we look for One greater than all, One who not only is able but also lovingly disposed to answer all our needs, we shall discover Him as He here reveals Himself to be, the *I am* of God in Jesus Christ. To seek anything less is neither to seek Him nor to find Him.

Wednesday, May 14th - John 4: 26

It is remarkable that Jesus should manifest Himself as Messiah more clearly and directly to this Samaritan woman than He had done even with His own disciples. Why did He do that? Ultimately the answer is to be found in the exercise of His sovereign grace. But here is an encouragement for us never to despair of anyone being beyond the pale of a richly saving visitation from the Lord.

Thursday, May 15th - John 4: 27

With the woman's attention so fully fixed upon Jesus, and with His gracious and generous giving of Himself to her, the disciples upon their return understood that something deeply significant was transpiring. They needed no explanation, for each of them in his own way had experienced a similar saving communion with the Lord. When our hearts and minds are fully set on Jesus, others are drawn to the One who is the great and gracious object of our concentration.

Friday, May 16th - John 4: 28, 29

This dear woman no longer thirsts for physical water, as evidenced in her leaving her water pot behind. She had indeed drunk of living water, and her soul was filled to overflowing. She had come to know the One who knew her fully; she had trusted Him to heal her broken, leaky life. Her trust was not disappointed. Her deepest needs were satisfied with an abundance which impelled and enabled her to give to others within the sphere of her influence--the men of Samaria. Indeed, only the Christ, the anointed Redeemer, can and does satisfy and fill our lives to overflowing.

Saturday, May 17th - John 4: 30

The woman left her water pot, but not her Savior. As her faithful enraptured communion with Jesus had arrested and concentrated the disciples' attention, so too her faithful

testimony in the city drew others as it were into the gravitational pull of her faith. This served to seize their attention, too, so that they left their city and all of their mundane concerns in order likewise to be filled with living water. Is our faith that contagious?

Sunday, May 18th - John 4: 31-34

Did Jesus ever get his drink of water? The question has faded into insignificance. For in giving Himself to this woman He has done something which not only satisfied her, but which also satisfied Himself. We would expect such giving from a weary man (v.6) to deprive Him further of vital energy. But instead He has been replenished by something better than food and drink. Think of it, His sustenance was in His sustaining of others. He feeds on feeding us. What a comfort this should be when we think He tires of ministering to us.

Monday, May 19th - John 4: 35-38

The principle that energy rightly expended in the work of God yields not deprivation but enrichment not only applies to our Lord, but also to His followers. When we sow ourselves in Christ's service, sharing not only the gospel but also our lives (1 Thess. 2:8), we lose nothing but rather gain infinitely for ourselves and others. We read in this passage of harvest, wages, fruit for eternal life, rejoicing. Indeed we do not read of costly, tiring labor except where our Lord notes our entering into others' labor. Ultimately, it is His labor we enter into--His life, service, death, resurrection. As He preceded His disciples in the gospel work in Samaria that they might harvest richly, so He has preceded us in every aspect of our service for him that we likewise might reap and rejoice.

Tuesday, May 20th - John 4: 39-42

There is no period of four months of waiting until harvest here. As Amos said, the reaper overtakes the sower (Amos 9:13). Many Samaritans, having believed the woman's testimony, were led to enjoy their own personal faith in and communion with Jesus whom they rightly saw to be not only Savior of the Jews, but of the world. This church apparently continued to grow (Acts 8:4ff). Here is abundant fruit from the single unlikely seed of this woman. We never know how God will use us, even in our weariness, or those we influence, despite their initial unsuitability for Christian service.

The Book of Acts

Wednesday, May 21st - Acts 1: 1, 2

The author of the book of Acts does not give us his name. However, with his mention of Theophilus--a man about whom we know nothing, except his name, meaning, beloved of God--we are taken back to the Gospel of Luke, wherein Theophilus is likewise addressed (Lk. 1:3). We should thus understand not only that Luke wrote both his Gospel and Acts, but also that Acts is really volume two of that Gospel. The Book of Acts forms a bridge between the Gospel, which narrate the life, teaching, works, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the epistles, with their doctrinal teaching about the significance of the person and work of Christ. This vital and vivid Book, therefore, serves as a mediating link between the accomplishment and application of redemption. We do well to read and heed its message.

Thursday, May 22nd - Acts 1: 1, 2

Luke recalls how his previously written Gospel records what Jesus began to do and teach. The priority is upon the work of Christ. The accomplishment of redemption takes priority over its application, for without such accomplished work there would be nothing to apply via teaching. But while the works and words of Jesus may be distinguished, they may not be separated. What the Son of God did, He declared, so that by His Word Christ might draw His people into His work, with all of its blessed consequences. His Word, then, is not opinion or wishful thinking, but an authoritative declaration of good and glorious news.

Friday, May 23rd - Acts 1: 1, 2

Luke's Gospel reported only what Jesus began to do and teach. The implication is that Acts gives a record of what the ascended Christ continued to do and teach through His apostles. Though Christ's accomplishment of redemption was completed at His ascension, His work of applying redemption to His people began at that point and carries on to our day and beyond. The Book of Acts is not merely an account of what men who lived long ago did; it is an account of the ever potent and universally spreading works of Christ.

Saturday, May 24th - Acts 1: 1-3

There is a prominent apologetic strain running through Acts. In the eyes of many in Luke's day--especially the Romans, with their penchant for law and order--the followers of Christ were suspect. Indeed, the Founder of what came to be known as The Way had been executed as a criminal. Luke shows in his Gospel how the crucifixion of Christ was a gross miscarriage of justice, and in Acts how unjust were other persecutions of believers. Thus we read, for example, of the unwarranted arrest of Peter and John (Acts 4), of the sinful stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), of Herod's malicious and capricious execution of James (Acts 12), of Paul and Silas being unjustly arrested and beaten at Philippi (Acts 16). In addition, we find recorded such instructively apologetic accounts as Paul with the pagans at Athens (Acts 17), and Paul's accounting for his missionary work before Agrippa (Acts 26), an accounting which leads him, prisoner though he was, to arraign his accusers and judges before the bar of the living God. Men could not suffer and prevail through such hostile encounters were they not assured of the truth that they served a risen Savior, who had made righteous peace with God and had vanquished sin, death,

and hell for them.

Sunday, May 25th - Acts 1: 1-3

With mention of the apostles in v.2 we may anticipate one of the major themes of Acts, namely, the conversion and fruitful career of the greatest of the apostles, Paul. He who had zealously persecuted the Church became, through his encounter with the ascended Christ, the greatest champion of the faith. Such an amazing effect must have a more amazing cause, which it did: the death and resurrection of the Son of God for His people.

Monday, May 26th - Acts 1: 1-3

In addition to its apologetic and its account of Paul's conversion, Acts shows that notwithstanding the coming in power of the Holy Spirit, the establishment of the kingdom of God would be in the face of many tribulations. The book is thus full of persecutions, trials, riots, and martyrdoms. Yet it is shown how nothing can stop the spread of the gospel. The Church of Christ and her gospel charter, which our Lord planted and nourished in Jerusalem, spread through all Judea, and through Samaria, and reached to Rome, the very heart of the Gentile world. Such a triumphant march of the gospel resulted not from human planning and effort, but from the power of God operating in and through the lives of His apostles and people. As John Calvin rightly observes: "Therefore more was achieved by these few contemptible little men against all the stormiest commotions of the world, with the humble sound of the human voice, than if God had thundered openly from heaven." (Commentary, vol. 6 p. 18). Through the new, resurrection life God had given to believers, they turned the world upside down, fruitfully and triumphantly serving their resurrected Lord amidst many tribulations.

Tuesday, May 27th - Acts 1: 4, 5

The redemptive working of the triune God is brought into clear focus in these verses. The Father, having planned redemption, promised its application to His people; the Son, having accomplished redemption, declared that the other Comforter would apply it to His people; the Holy Spirit thus would come to God's people in fulfillment of the Father's promise and the Son's completed work. We should accordingly understand that our salvation results from nothing less than the full and unreserved working of the triune God.

Wednesday, May 28th - Acts 1: 4, 5

Although Jesus left earth and ascended to heaven, he did not thereby abandon His Church, but rather filled it with His own power through the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is through His Spirit that Jesus abides with His people to the end of time (Mt. 28:20). Such coming of the Holy Spirit was promised by the prophets (Ezek. 36:26,27; Joel 2:28,29), and was prefigured in the baptism of John. What John's baptism sacramentally promised, Christ would essentially provide through His baptizing of His people in the Holy Spirit.

Thursday, May 29th - Acts 1: 4, 5

The disciples of Jesus, despite all they and heard and seen in the words and works of Jesus would not be competent to serve Christ effectively without their receiving Holy

Spirit baptism. Hence, they were obliged to wait in Jerusalem, the city in which Christ was crucified for our sins, was resurrected for our justification (Rom. 4:25), and from which He ascended to minister to His people by His perpetual intercessions (Heb. 7:25). There in Jerusalem would the disciples of Jesus receive the empowering blessing of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. But they would receive Him in God's time, not their own, so that they and we might learn that without the gift of this heavenly Comforter neither they nor we should attempt anything for the Lord. Whether we work or wait is a decision we must leave to our Lord.

Friday, May 30th - Acts 1: 6

Despite all that Jesus began to do and teach in His three years of public ministry--a ministry wherein these disciples participated and were the primary pupils of the Lord--the disciples reveal how unenlightened and without spiritual power they are in their asking of this question. Practically every word of their query misses the truth and gracious intention of Jesus. He promises them the pledge of heaven in the person of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13,14), and their thoughts and expectations can rise no higher than an earthly kingdom confined to the little boundaries of Israel. Nothing can more clearly demonstrate how poorly we apprehend the majesty of our Lord and the magnitude of His great and precious promises than our expressing of our puny thoughts and expectations regarding His work in and through us. No words could more eloquently express how desperately even these best of our Lord's disciples needed the Holy Spirit.

Saturday, May 31st - Acts 1: 6

Jesus taught His disciples concerning the kingdom of God; they conceived of His teaching in terms of an earthly kingdom of material splendor and outward peace, wherein they would hold prominent positions (Mk. 10:35ff; Lk. 22:24ff). They also betray a desire to have their wages before they do their work, for Jesus was sending them the Holy Spirit to empower their service for Him, not to have them sit as petty potentates ruling over an earthly empire. Not only do they mistake the nature of the kingdom of God, they also confine its extent to the borders of national Israel, while Jesus had intention for His kingdom to spread to all of the world (v. 8). Finally, the entire question is prompted by a desire to satisfy personal curiosity, not by a determination rightly to apprehend and gratefully employ the precious and potent promise of the Father. Our own desires will ever lead us into useless and impoverishing speculations, while our trusting and acceptance of what our Lord gives us and our submissive use thereof will always enrich and empower us to serve for God's glory.

Sunday, June 1st - Acts 1: 6-8

Not only did the disciples err in their conceptions of the kingdom of God, they also were mistaken in their supposition that its glory would immediately be manifested. Jesus corrects all of these errors by reminding His disciples that the essence of their participation in the kingdom of God consisted of their trusting and submissive obedience to God, not in their knowing the hidden counsels of the Lord. Our need is not to know all the details of the way of our pilgrimage, but rather simply to know and follow our Good Shepherd who knows the way.

Monday, June 2nd - Acts 1: 6-8

Jesus denies His disciples the satisfaction of their carnal curiosity. Yet, when our Lord denies He also confers some greater good than the denied desire. They wanted a bit of knowledge; He promises them nothing less than the power of God's Holy Spirit. By His conferring upon them such a gift, Christ would both empower them for their duty and enlighten them with true and useful knowledge.

Tuesday, June 3rd - Acts 1: 6-8

Nothing is more debilitating and deadly to man than his seeking knowledge forbidden by God. Recall how Adam ushered in all of the world's woes by his seeking such knowledge. However, when we submit ourselves to be taught by God, we grow in true knowledge and power. Without such trusting submission we lack both. Jesus informs His disciples that they would be in need of both sound knowledge and divine power, for the commission He gives to them is arduous, dangerous, and vast. Their calling is nothing less than to conquer the world for Christ--a task for which they would need all that Christ promised to give to them.

Wednesday, June 4th - Acts 1: 6-8

The disciples are told by Jesus that they shall conquer the world and usher in the kingdom of God, doing so neither by force of arms nor by instantaneous magic. Their sole tool was to be the word of their testimony concerning Christ. They were to begin this task in Jerusalem, where Jesus had recently been crucified, and where the murderous malice of the Jews still burned hotly. From there they were to go to the rest of the Jews, to the hated Samaritans, and to the despised Gentiles. What protection would they have from their foes? What prompting would motivate them to go in loving faithfulness to enemies and strangers? Only the indwelling Holy Spirit and the good news of their testimony. With such seemingly frail weapons these men turned the world upside down.

Thursday, June 5th - Acts 1: 9

Jesus had given to His apostles an awesome challenge: to be His witnesses in a world where the response of those hearing the apostolic testimony would likely range from indifference to hostility. But the Lord also gave the promise of the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who would enable the apostles most fruitfully to fulfill their mission. Would such a word of promise be sufficient? It had to be, for no sooner had Jesus given it than He left them, giving them no option except to trust and obey His Word. As blessed as the nearer presence of Jesus may be, we must never think that He forsakes us and deprives us of continued blessing when He withdraws from us His sensible presence.

Friday, June 6th - Acts 1: 9

Jesus did not abandon His apostles. He ascended into heaven, from which highest place He would send the Holy Spirit and would Himself perpetually intercede for them. Yet, while they saw Jesus lifted up, they were prevented from seeing Him enter into the celestial glory. A cloud enveloped Jesus, obscuring their sight. They who were to teach others to walk by faith, not sight (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 1:18ff; 1 Pet. 1:8,9) were the first to learn that lesson most vividly at the ascension. Though Jesus is nowhere visible on earth,

and though His full glory is obscured by clouds of testing providence, yet He lives and reigns over, for, in, and through His people.

Saturday, June 7th - Acts 1: 9-11

The cloud which received Jesus may well have been luminous, like the Shekhinah which rested upon the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). At any rate, three of these apostles--Peter, James, and John--had witnessed earlier on the mount of transfiguration a cloud enveloping Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Mt. 17:1-8). When that cloud lifted, Jesus remained. Then, our Lord Himself spoke of His second coming as one where He would be coming on the clouds of heaven. No wonder, then, that the apostles continued looking at the cloud. They perhaps thought that from it Jesus would emerge. Instead, two angels appeared with them. The angelic attendants at the empty tomb of Jesus (Lk. 24:4), who authoritatively announced that death could not hold Him, here appear as Christ seems to vacate the earth. Once more the angels announce that Christ's being not where His followers expected, signifies something far greater than their highest expectations.

Sunday, June 8th - Acts 1: 10, 11

The apostles desired and perhaps expected to behold Christ again with their bodily senses. The angels call their attention back to earth by their addressing the apostles as men of Galilee. But they were now changed men, and through them the world would be forever changed. For although they labored for Jesus on earth, they served a living Christ who reigned on their behalf in heaven. He was exalted to fill all things (Eph. 4:10), and He would, in the fullness of time, return to receive these men of Galilee into the heavenly glory He had prepared for them. By the grace and power of our ascended Lord we, too, serve heaven's King and are destined to be one day escorted into heaven's fullest glory by that King personally returning for us. Such a hope should more than sustain us through our earthly pilgrimage.

Monday, June 9th - Acts 1: 10, 11

We should learn two essential things from the angelic announcement. The first thing is to know that Jesus did not leave His people; He was taken up, exalted to heaven by the Father. Thus we should never desire to have Him with us bodily, for to do so betrays not only ingratitude and contempt for that other Comforter, the Holy Spirit, but also would have the power and sovereign glory of Jesus to be diminished. Yet we shall not always be, as it were, nearer to Him by our accepting His having been taken up from us. For we learn also that He will come to earth again to receive His own into consummate glory, and to judge and condemn to perdition those who do not acknowledge Him. Meantime, Jesus works in heaven for our good, while we serve on earth for His glory.

Tuesday, June 10th - Acts 1: 12-14

These humble men of Galilee were bidden by Jesus not to return there and take up their former vocations; they were commissioned by the risen and ascended Christ to enter Jerusalem, there to await the empowering coming of the Holy Spirit, and from there to testify of Christ to all nations. Christ may find His people in obscure places and occupied in mundane pursuits, but He does not leave them there. Accordingly, these men return to Jerusalem, the city where Jesus had been crucified and where they had previously

huddled together for fear of the Jews (Jn. 20:19). To that hard and hostile city they returned, emboldened by their trust in their ascended Lord, whose highest vantage point comported with His perfect wisdom, supreme authority, and unlimited power. Men can only fearlessly enter the jaws of death when they know they serve and are led by the One who has vanquished all of their enemies, including death.

Wednesday, June 11th - Acts 1: 12-14

The physical distance the apostles covered on their return to Jerusalem was not great. Estimates range from 1.5 to 2 miles. Yet in their covering that short distance they were crossing a bridge from which there would be no return. As their Master had resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem and to the cross, so they set their faces to go there and, when duly empowered, to testify of their crucified and risen Lord. Their unity in this single purpose led them to stay together in one upper room, eleven individual men, who by Christ were forged into the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20). Short steps, when taken in obedience to Christ, lead to giant and glorious strides.

Thursday, June 12th - Acts 1: 13

The list of the disciple's names given here differs slightly in order and in the names of certain ones, who were without doubt known by more than one designation. These variations of names and order of listing should not be pressed to yield greater significance than intended. Peter, James, and John as ever are heading up the band. But the real significance at this point seems to be this: that these men--all of whom had fled from their Lord after His arrest--are here present for muster when divine orders are given, which orders they, to a man, obey.

Friday, June 13th - Acts 1: 12-14

The apostles waited together in Jerusalem in obedience to the instructions of Jesus (Lk. 24:49), but they were not idle while they waited. They gave themselves to corporate prayer, being joined by certain devout women, who, no doubt (unless some were the wives of the apostles), did not dwell in the upper room with these men, but spent their days there with the apostles. It is significant that the last historical mention made of Mary, the mother of Jesus, portrays her as a humble supplicant at the throne of the Jesus she grew to know not so much as her son, but as her sovereign Lord. Such prayer meetings are found repeatedly in the Book of Acts. It is an impoverishing pity that they are so lightly esteemed and rarely found in the Church today.

Saturday, June 14th - Acts 1: 15-19

Besides prayer, the disciples were occupied with the task of filling the vacant apostleship of Judas. From v.15 to the end of this chapter the theme is that of the uniqueness of the Apostolate. Although Peter spoke to about 120 persons gathered, what he said and the procedure followed to elect a new apostle make clear that no more than twelve--the number chosen by Jesus--were to serve as apostles. It was Judas' apostacy, more than his death, which left his office vacant. Death alone could not, in fact, create a vacancy in the office of apostle, for when James is later killed (Acts 12), there is no election to replace him. This unique office was to cease with the death of the twelve called to occupy it. For the apostles alone were called and equipped by God to teach with infallible authority, of

which we have the repository in the New Testament Scriptures. Thus, as only the confused, carnal, and misguided would think themselves enriched by their having the bodily presence of Christ in the world today, so that sort only would desire to perpetuate the Apostolate, which God laid as the foundation for His Church (Eph. 2:20).

Sunday, June 15th - Acts 1: 15-19

Peter distinguishes an apostle (v.17) from an apostate (v.16). Luke parenthetically elaborates the gruesome and ignominious death of Judas--a death wrought by Judas' own hand. Apostles are sent from Jesus to speak of the shed blood of a Redeemer who saves sinners; apostates lead hostile forces against Jesus, thinking to profit thereby. Yet the ultimate profit apostates receive is shameful and painful self-destruction.

Monday, June 16th - Acts 1: 16-20

To preclude our thinking that Judas' apostacy manifested a defect in the calling he received from Jesus to be a disciple, Peter reminds us that Scripture had foretold the defection of the son of perdition. No less an instrument than King David, the man after God's own heart, wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit of the falling away of Judas (Ps. 69:25; 109:8). Scripture foretold the defection of Judas, thus demonstrating that God had sinlessly ordained to use the sin of Judas to precipitate events which would lead to the cross, and hence to our salvation. Furthermore, God's Word gave direction for the filling of that office vacated by Judas. Note from this how the apostles were men of the Word, and note further how sufficient Scripture is to speak to any need the Church may have.

Tuesday, June 17th - Acts 1: 21, 22

Peter progresses from exposition to application of Scripture in these verses. God's Word directed that the vacant office of Judas be given to another man. Thus, Peter, not as pope but in concert with the other apostles, knowing that God had ordained them as leaders in His Church, set about ordering the life of the Church according to the Word of God. It could not be just any man to fill the vacant office. Therefore, the two vital qualifications of an apostle are set forth to narrow the field of nominees. The man must have been with the disciples from the outset of Jesus' public ministry, which commenced with His baptism by John; and he must have seen the risen Christ. An apostle must have full, accurate, first hand, and personal knowledge of the redeeming career of our Savior, all so that we may know the true Christ and His true redemption through the apostolic testimony.

Wednesday, June 18th - Acts 1: 23-26

Two men, who met the necessary qualifications, were nominated for the office of apostle. Were there not more than two? And why were there two, when only one was required? We must judge the matter from the event as it is recorded. It is clear from the prayer (v.24) that the company, as far as they could discern, saw equal suitability in both candidates. From this we may understand that even at this seminal stage in the life of the New Testament Church, there was an abundance of eminent and worthy men. At the same time, we must observe how humble the apostles are in their carrying out of this election. They do not submit the matter to a vote of the people, but, by means of the drawing of lots, they put the matter directly to the choice of God. Thus, we detect an

implicit third qualification for an apostle: a direct calling and commissioning from God. The foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20) is laid by the Lord, not by man.

Thursday, June 19th - Acts 1: 23-26

Such devices as the lot and Urim and Thummin had long been used by the Jews to determine the will of God in specific matters (Num. 27:21; Josh. 7:14-18; Prov. 16:33). But there is no Scriptural account of Urim and Thummin being used after Judah's exile, nor is there any account of the lot being used after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the Church and indwelt her members. Through the Word and Spirit of God we now have an all-sufficient guide for our actions.

Friday, June 20th - Acts 1: 23-26

We may suppose from the listing of Joseph's name first, and from the number and character of his names, that of the two, he was perhaps the more esteemed among men. His name, Barsabbas, meant son of peacefulness, and his other name, Justus, meant honest and fair. But God sees the heart as no man can do. The apostles, knowing this, resort to prayer and to the lot so that God may make His choice known, which He did. God exalts Matthias, the apparent lesser of the two, thus teaching us that He is not concerned with the opinion of men, but rather with the condition of one's heart in His sight. Though Matthias and most of the other apostles named in v.13 did not personally write Scripture or have recorded in Scripture significant things about them, who but the God who ordained them can calculate what their lives, their prayers, their godly examples, their counsels, and sacrifices contributed to the Church in their day, or to the writing of Scripture for our day?

Saturday, June 21st - Acts 2: 1

In this second chapter of Acts we have a record of the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. We also are given an account of the phenomenal and personal effects of His coming. The time of this coming is precisely noted. The day of Pentecost was 50 days after the last Sabbath of Passover, or, we may reckon, 50 days after the resurrection and 10 days after the ascension of Christ. Augustine notes that as the finger of God wrote the Law on stone for the Jews 50 days after their exodus, so the Spirit of God comes 50 days after Christ's resurrection to write God's Law in our hearts. Jesus had promised this powerful coming of the Holy Spirit (1:4,5,8). What our Lord promises He always provides; and what He provides is always greater than what we could ask or think, even when our asking and thinking are conditioned by the divine promises. Our Lord is not only as good as His Word, He is consistently better than His Word.

Sunday, June 22nd - Acts 2: 1

We do well to note that those who received this Holy Spirit baptism were together in one place. Jesus had commanded them to wait for this blessing in Jerusalem (1:4), but He said

nothing explicitly about their spending their time together. Such unity, however, is clearly a fruit of the divine intention in reconciliation. For in Christ we are not only reconciled to God, but also to one another, the sin which had alienated us from God and man having been mortified so that erstwhile strangers become an integrated, loving family of faith. The best blessings of our redemption always are given by God and partaken of by us when we are together in fellowship.

Monday, June 23rd - Acts 2: 1-4

Who were the ones gathered together on Pentecost and so made recipients of this Holy Spirit baptism? Many assume that it was the 120 mentioned in 1:15. Yet, as we have seen, the focus of the latter half of Acts 1 is the apostles. And when the phenomenal coming of the Holy Spirit is criticized by some (2:13), we read of Peter, "*taking his stand with the eleven*" (2:14). It appears correct, therefore, that we understand this unique, phenomenal baptism with the Holy Spirit to have been applied to the unique officers in Christ's Church, namely, the apostles. Later in Acts we shall see how, when certain persons are converted, their Holy Spirit baptism is accompanied by some (not all) of the signs listed in this chapter. But there are discernible reasons for those other phenomenal baptisms. Most believers do not receive phenomenal signs at their Holy Spirit baptism, yet the substance of their baptism is the same as that experienced by the apostles.

Tuesday, June 24th - Acts 2: 1, 2

We should understand that this Pentecostal Holy Spirit baptism experienced by the apostles was uniquely accompanied by phenomenal signs. Many in our day teach that this experience is normative, not unique. In attempts to validate their confused teaching, such persons endeavor to conjure such accompanying signs, but, on close and biblically critical examination, such purported signs, being too few and too weak in comparison with what is recorded in these verses, prove to be counterfeit. Men may be encouraged to wag their tongues as a sign of their Spirit baptism, but let there be tongues of fire and rushing wind--phenomena which gullible souls cannot imitate--if we are to believe that what is recorded in these verses is normative and perpetual in the Church. We do not enrich our experience of the substance of Spirit baptism by our trying to add to it poor counterfeits of those unique signs which accompanied the apostles' Spirit baptism.

Wednesday, June 25th - Acts 2: 1, 2

The first inimitable sign which accompanied the apostles' Spirit baptism was primarily audible. The source of the rushing wind, we are told, was heaven, by which we are to understand not the atmospheric sky, but rather the celestial throne of God. This was

phenomenal evidence of the breath of God, filling these men with new life and power (Ezek. 37:9-14; Jn. 3:8; 20:22). Wind may appear incorporeal and insubstantial, yet we may note its presence and power by the effects it works. So it is with the Holy Spirit, who though unseen yet works miraculous effects when He causes the Word--the breath of God (2 Tim. 3:16)--to raise up men dead in sin to newness of life.

Thursday, June 26th - Acts 2: 1-3

The second sign accompanying the apostles' Spirit baptism was visual. What Luke refers to as *tongues of fire* appeared and rested on each apostle. Fire, as wind, is also used as a phenomenal manifestation of God. We need only recall Moses seeing the burning bush, which while ablaze was not consumed (Ex. 3:2-5). So these tongues of fire sat on each apostle, but did not burn them. The Spirit appeared as a dove when He descended upon Jesus at His baptism, thus signifying the pure and peaceful delight in which God held His Son, and in which He would hold all for whom His Son would be a sacrifice (Mt. 3:13-17). Here the Spirit descends upon sinful, albeit redeemed men, and so He comes to them as a purging power. Recall the cleansing fire applied to Isaiah's lips (Is. 6:7). Henceforth, the apostles would minister with the purifying power of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin remarks, "The Lord shows therefore that their voice is to be as fire, to kindle the hearts of men, for the burning up...of the vanity of the world and the purging and renewing of all things." (*Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 51).

Friday, June 27th - Acts 2: 4

The third sign accompanying the apostles' Spirit baptism was their speaking with other tongues. Some maintain, since this verse explicitly links their being filled with the Holy Spirit and their speaking with other tongues, that this is the only normative sign which should perpetually accompany Spirit baptism. By their doing so, they overlook the fact that the three accompanying signs form a unit associated with the apostles' Spirit baptism. All three signs indicate some essential aspect regarding the substance of their baptism with the Holy Spirit. The signs uniquely accompanied the apostles' baptism; the substance of this baptism and of the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit belongs to all who are in Christ (Rom. 8:9).

Saturday, June 28th - Acts 2: 4

We do not need to wonder what it means that the apostles spoke with other tongues. It is evident from vv. 5ff that they were given miraculous ability to speak human languages other than their native one. In fact, the term translated *tongues* (*glwssai*), is used ever, only, and always in the Septuagint (referred to as LXX, the Greek translation of the Old

Testament) to mean dialects, or languages. Never in the whole Bible does the term mean ecstatic, non-propositional speech. What, in fact, occurs in this verse is a divinely given token of the reversal of that curse of the division of tongues at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). Calvin helpfully remarks, "Diversity of tongues would have been an obstacle to the wide dissemination of the gospel....This reflects the marvellous goodness of God, in that a punishment for human pride was transformed into a means of blessing. For what cause was the diversity of tongues but that the wicked and lawless designs of men might be brought to nothing (Gen. 11:7)? But now God furnishes the apostles with a diversity of tongues that He may call back lost and wandering men into the blessings of unity." (*Commentary*, vol.6, p.51).

Sunday, June 29th - Acts 2: 1-4

Prior to this day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was at work in the world. He inspired prophets and writers of Scriptures; He granted faith and repentance to believers; He overshadowed Mary in the conception of Jesus; He anointed Jesus above measure, enabling Him to accomplish His atoning work. But never before had the Holy Spirit come permanently to indwell believers. He spoke *to* believers, worked *savingly upon* them, and spoke *through* them, but this filling and indwelling was something new. His living *in* believers was then and is now the fulfillment of the Father's promise, as Peter makes clear by his citing Joel 2:28-32, and as many other passages of Scripture make clear (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:25-27; Jn. 14:16,17; 16:7-14). The importance and power of God's Holy Spirit residing in believers cannot be over-emphasized.

Monday, June 30th - Acts 2: 5-11

The true nature and the gracious divine design of the gift of tongues become readily apparent in these verses. Tongues betoken world evangelization. This miraculous enabling of the apostles to speak other languages was intended neither for mere spectacle, nor for personal enjoyment, but rather for the readily understandable declaration of the mighty works of God to people of every tongue, tribe, and nation of the world. What began as an instantaneous, miraculous endowment given to the apostles, has spread through the ages by the Spirit's use of ordinary means, so that today the Church speaks in many more tongues than she did through her apostles on the day of Pentecost, and all speaking of the same thing--the mighty works of God.

Tuesday, July 1st - Acts 2: 5, 6

What the Holy Spirit had done by His coming to fill the apostles soon gained wider attention. We are told that devout Jews, who had come to stay in Jerusalem for the feast

of Pentecost, heard the sound which commanded their attention. That sound may initially have been the heavenly wind (v.2), or it may have been a quickly spreading report of all that was happening to and through the apostles. Whatever sound first got their attention, the sound which kept their attention was the apostles declaring to them the mighty works of God. These Jews, who were most likely descendants of those who had been carried off into exile, never to return to Israel, were hearing the gospel in their own native tongues. But rather than this phenomenon initially facilitating their understanding of the message of salvation, they found themselves bewildered by it. Sin has so darkened our world, our perception, and our understanding, that the light and love of God clearly shining forth seems at first strange to us.

Wednesday, July 2nd - Acts 2: 7-11

Most men of that day were bilingual and even trilingual. Hebrew was the proper language of Judah, but most spoke a variant, Aramaic, which those east of Judah widely spoke. Many also spoke Greek, the language of lands west of Judah. It is doubtful, however, that the apostles--several of whom were simple fishermen and all of whom were from Galilee, an area not nearly so cosmopolitan as Jerusalem--could naturally speak more than their own native tongue. Yet here they were, betraying their simple Galilean origins through their accents, yet speaking the languages spoken throughout the entire world. How could men confined for most of their lives to one rather obscure region of the earth speak with masterful command the languages of all the earth, unless, of course, they were enabled to do so by the God who knows not only all of men's words, but even their thoughts and intentions?

Thursday, July 3rd - Acts 2: 9-11

This conglomerated mixture of pilgrims in Jerusalem represents a seminal bridge between the Jews, to whom the gospel was first preached, and the rest of the world. Though they were themselves for the most part Jews, they were Jews of the diaspora--the children of Israel dispersed initially through the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles--and so lived their lives amidst pagan nations. But not all were Jews. There were proselytes, even from Rome. No one but God can accurately calculate the blessed seed planted in those people that day, which was carried back by them to their homes to be dispersed through the world.

Friday, July 4th - Acts 2: 12, 13

Though these devout men beheld the sign of Holy Spirit baptism, they were confused as to the substance signified by the sign. The more cynical ones attributed the miracle to

drunkenness; the better ones professed only amazed ignorance. Thus we see that signs and tokens, even when miraculously given by God, are greatly limited in what they can convey. The real need is for authoritative testimony and teaching regarding the true meaning and import of such signs. Accordingly, the focus of what follows shifts from miraculous phenomena to ministerial preaching of God's Word. We would all remain in perpetual confusion were we to be confronted only by the deeds of God without the inspired doctrine of His Word to explain to us those deeds.

Saturday, July 5th - Acts 2: 14-16

The Lord leads His apostles on from their exercise of the token of tongues to the exercise of the real substance of redemptive testimony. Peter takes his stand with the other eleven apostles--all of whom had been speaking in tongues--and declares in his own language a sermon. In it, he denies that the token of tongues resulted from the abuse of creational intoxicants, and he asserts that the phenomenon issued as a fulfillment of Scripture. The sermon which follows is by far a more full and transforming result of the Holy Spirit's filling than the previous and somewhat perplexing speaking in tongues. Tokens play only a brief, provisional part, whereas the substance endures through time and eternity.

Sunday, July 6th - Acts 2: 15-21

It is fascinating and instructive for us to note which Scriptures the apostles quote when speaking or writing, and to note how they sometimes make subtle changes in what they quote. Peter quotes from Joel 2:28-32, no doubt because of its clear reference to God's Spirit enabling God's people to prophesy. Thus, the sceptics and mockers are informed that what they were hearing as the apostles spoke in tongues was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. They were also informed that such speaking in tongues was essentially an exercise of prophesying, or speaking a revelatory message from God--a fact often ignored by those today who maintain that tongues speaking is an ecstatic prayer and praise phenomenon. Peter changes the Joel passage a bit, by his saying explicitly that this would be in the last days (cf., Joel: "*And it will come about after this*"). In his doing this he does not twist Scripture, but rather, being himself inspired by the same Holy Spirit, states explicitly what is contained implicitly in the Joel Passage. Also, Peter concludes his citation in the middle of a verse (Joel 2:32), so as to lay emphasis upon men's response of calling on the Lord to be saved. Thus, the apostle communicates that the fullness of the Holy Spirit has come neither to cause a spectacle nor to entertain, but to point men to salvation in Christ.

Monday, July 7th - Acts 2: 15-18

The Joel passage cited by Peter speaks of a greater, spiritual work and a lesser, phenomenal work. The greater work is spoken of in vv. 17, 18; the lesser in vv. 19,20. What Joel prophesied and what Peter declares to be the fulfillment of that prophecy is God's pouring out His Holy Spirit upon believers, enabling them to prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams--all of which is to say that they shall perceive and communicate revelation from God (cf., Num. 12:6). The last days refer to the entire period from Christ's first coming to His second coming. Such gifts of revelation are not to be understood as being in existence and exercise for that whole period, but rather they served for the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:20). The magnitude of this foundational revelation is appreciated when we remember that on the day of Pentecost, not one word of New Testament Scripture had been written, and, indeed, until the coming of John the Baptist, not a single revelatory divine utterance had been received since the time of Malachi--namely, for a period of several hundred years. We now have the perfect repository of this revelation in Scripture, and so the provisional, revelatory gifts are no longer needed. Yet we continue to need and, by God's grace to have, God's Holy Spirit not only poured upon us but dwelling in us.

Tuesday, July 8th - Acts 2: 19, 20

The lesser, phenomenal or symbolic work of God is referred to in these verses. The divine Worker of redemption causes the creation--also His handiwork--to indicate something regarding the significance of the coming of the Holy Spirit. First, we may ask when these cosmic disturbances took place. In answer, we point to that period of darkness and celestial as well as terrestrial disturbance which occurred while our Lord hung on the cross (Mt. 27:45, 50-53). As to the point of it all, we perhaps are helped in our understanding if we consult the account of Jesus healing the paralytic (Mt. 9:1-8). There Jesus did the infinitely greater work of forgiving the man's sins--a work which only God had prerogative and power to do. Then, to indicate the reality of that work, our Lord performed a far lesser phenomenal work, but still one which only God could do, namely, He healed the man's body. If the Word of God through Jesus performed the lesser work, we should not doubt that His Word regarding the greater work of forgiveness is likewise true. Thus, if the creational sources of light are darkened by the direct, miraculous hand of God, we are taught that it is only so because the greater and perfect eternal light was being sent into the world and into the hearts of believers (Rev. 21:23).

Wednesday, July 9th - Acts 2: 19-21

When creation's mediate sources of light are dimmed in connection with Christ accomplishing and the Holy Spirit coming to apply redemption, we should know that salvation is from a heavenly, not an earthly, source. We are not saved by our dependence upon or building up of this world, which is passing away (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Thursday, July 10th - Acts 2: 22, 23

Peter calls upon these now seriously attentive men of Israel, who by their covenant privileges, their training in the Scriptures, and their tutoring in the ceremonial law, should have been expectantly looking for and welcoming the coming of their Messiah. Yet, these Jews are charged with their most heinous crime: putting Christ to death. It is the Peter who was before a self-regarding coward and denier of Jesus who now boldly charges them. Whence such boldness in Peter? It issued from the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:7) fixing the apostle's complete attention on the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ, who reigned as victor over death and life and all things.

Friday, July 11th - Acts 2: 22, 23

The sanction of God upon the person and works of Jesus was so open and clear that Peter states it as a matter which no reasonable person could deny. Yet the monstrous and irrational nature of sin is seen when these Jews, whom Peter says knew that Jesus was indeed the God-given King of the Jews, got the hated, pagan Romans to do for them their dirtiest of works, namely, crucify their King. Sin is such a deep, dark, destructive power. However, sin's power is no match for the redeeming power of the God whom Peter declares to have graciously and sovereignly planned sinlessly to use men's worst sin to effect salvation for His people.

Saturday, July 12th - Acts 2: 22-24

The inconceivable greatness of the wisdom, power, and gracious lovingkindness of the Lord is manifested in this most concentrated declaration, that man at his worst served to precipitate the highest and best work of God. Those who put Christ to death served not to destroy Christ, but rather to destroy death, its dark and destructive force having been overpowered by the light and eternal life to which Christ was raised.

Sunday, July 13th - Acts 2: 22-24

We must recall that Peter and the apostles have been baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. And yet Peter speaks not of the Spirit, but of Christ. As John Calvin rightly remarks: "Now this is the proper use of all gifts which we have through Christ--that they should lead us to Christ, as to the source of all." (*Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 62).

Monday, July 14th - Acts 2: 25-28

The assertion made by Peter that death could not hold Christ is supported not only by the resurrection, to which the apostle referred in v.24, but also by the attestation of Scripture. The inspired words of David are quoted from Ps. 16. In that psalm, David speaks as though he were the subject--the Holy One not held in death and corruption. Peter, however, by the citation implies that Jesus is the subject (an implication drawn out explicitly in vv.29-32). Therefore, we learn that David, writing by inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, speaks of Christ and of himself in Christ, knowing that his freedom from death and corruption, and positive, joyful communion with God, depend upon the work of Christ's submitting Himself to death in trusting obedience to His Father (v.25), and so vanquishing death for the people of God. This citation elaborates somewhat the nature of that salvation spoken of in v.21. Negatively, it is freedom from death and hell; positively, it is eternal life and fullness of joy in closest communion with God in Christ.

Tuesday, July 15th - Acts 2: 29-32

In these verses Peter explicitly states that the subject of Ps. 16, which he just quoted, could not be David, the undeniable fact being that David did die, his body was buried and underwent corruption. Accordingly, David's experiencing the wages of sin demonstrated that he was himself a sinner in need of salvation. Yet David, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophetically wrote of Christ, who was resurrected, who could not be held in death's power, and who did not undergo any corruption. Scripture predicted what God did and what the apostles witnessed personally. Jesus was raised from the dead, and His resurrection manifested Him to be the unique Savior from death and Lord of life.

Wednesday, July 16th - Acts 2: 33

Peter had demonstrated that the subject of Ps. 16 was not David, but rather the Messiah, and that by His resurrection, Jesus was manifested by God to be the Messiah. In this verse, the apostle goes on to speak of the current ministry of the exalted Redeemer. Christ, who had accomplished redemption through the work of His humiliation, ever lives to apply redemption to His people by the Holy Spirit. From His place of supreme power and honor at God's right hand, our Lord liberally pours forth the promise of the Father. It is, asserts Peter, nothing less than this blessed issue from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit which the men of Israel were beholding as the apostles gave evidence of their being filled with the Holy Spirit. What they were witnessing was infinitely more precious, pure, and powerful than they had supposed when they attributed this phenomenon to drunkenness. The best of men would be similarly blind to the true nature of God's work were it not for a Spirit-anointed ministry of God's Word.

Thursday, July 17th - Acts 2: 34, 35

Peter carries forward his argument to show that Scripture not only prophesied the resurrection of Christ, but also His ascension. Additionally, Peter reminds his hearers that it patently was not David, great as he was, but great David's greater Son who ascended to sit at the right hand of God. In this way, the apostle follows the reasoning of his Lord and Master, who had, during His earthly life cited this very passage (Ps. 110:1). Jesus appealed to this Scripture as testimony to His divinity (Mt. 22:41-46); Peter appeals to it in support of the God/man's ascended sovereignty. David, Israel's greatest king, who had vanquished all of the earthly enemies of the covenant nation, thus ushering in a secure peace under Solomon, was not the one who ascended the highest of thrones. Jesus did ascend to the heavenly throne, having vanquished all of the enemies of His people, especially the greatest--sin, death, condemnation. From that throne the God/man dispatched the promised Holy Spirit to empower His people to overcome all of His enemies and theirs (Rom. 8:35-39).

Friday, July 18th - Acts 2: 36

The call to attention issued in v.14 and advanced in v.22 now reaches its conclusion. With the words, "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain....*," the apostle declares that there remains no further need for information or persuasive appeal. The sole conclusion which any reasonable mind could reach was that Jesus had been purposed, promised, and provided by God as the only sovereign Lord and anointed Savior of the world (Acts 4:10-12). To this glorious fact, faith adheres; from it, unbelief is vanquished to eternal outer darkness. The magnitude of this truth cannot be overstated.

Saturday, July 19th - Acts 2: 36, 37

The unique Christ, who was purposed, promised, and provided by God as Savior and Lord was crucified by the very people whom Peter was addressing. This apostle, who had previously shuddered at the words of a servant girl and denied Jesus with oaths and cursings because he feared men, now by the Spirit's filling is enlightened and empowered to see and say things as they really are, namely, that men have greatest cause to fear their heinous crime against the living God and His Christ. Because of Peter's faithfulness to the Lord and fearlessness of men, these men also are compelled to see this true perspective. Not outwardly, but with their hearts and consciences do they apprehend their plight before God, and in true conviction they cry out. They rightly perceive that their crime, which was not only one of manipulated murder, but of highest blasphemy and foulest treason against their God and heavenly King, was too great for them to bear. Thus, they seek a relief which is deep, complete, and permanent. In sum, they have been brought to a desperate hunger for the good news of salvation in Christ.

Sunday, July 20th - Acts 2: 38, 39

To the cry of a convicted heart (v.37), God gives a clear and wonderful answer. Sinners, guilty of the body and blood of Christ, must become new persons, and by the provision of God in Christ, can and do become new persons. They cannot, of course, regenerate themselves--that is the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. But regenerated ones demonstrate their new life by two primary acts: the inward act of repentance, and the outward act of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Nothing short of such a total inward and outward change could clear sinners of their monstrous and monumental guilt.

(these notes first published September 1989)

Monday, July 21st - John 4:40-43

Spiritual revival had come to Samaria, and yet Jesus stayed there only two days. Would we not have been tempted to stay longer, sensing a supposed responsibility to follow-up with these new converts? Yet Jesus always knew when His work in one place was finished--or at least had reached a point where He could go on to something else. The encouraging certainty we should have is that when the Lord's manifested power leaves our locale to work mightily elsewhere, such movement represents not our abandonment, but His extension and enrichment of the one family of faith.

Tuesday, July 22nd - John 4:43,44

While Jesus returned to His home region of Galilee, He did not go back to His home town of Nazareth, but rather to Cana. There was a reason for this avoidance. It is an awful testimony to man's fallen condition that for most, familiarity even with the Son of God can breed contempt.

There is in all of us a tendency not to honor those people and things closest to us. Is it not most difficult, for example, to witness to unbelieving family members? Likewise, those living closest to and longest under a faithful ministry of the Word can begin to take it for granted, to tire of it, failing to be conscious of the good it is doing them. This tendency springs from sin, which devalues everything, especially things closest to us, imputing to them the inferiority we feel about ourselves. Let us then foster true love and respect for each other, for the ordinances of grace, and especially for the Lord Himself.

Wednesday, July 23rd - John 4:45

The Galileans received Jesus with respect because they had witnessed the open and abundant display of His blessed and blessing power in Jerusalem at the feast. Here is an encouragement for us to avail ourselves of God's means of grace. Christ manifests Himself most clearly amongst His people as they gather, especially on the Lord's day, for worship and growth in grace. Those absenting themselves most from the Lord's house, receive Him with least understanding--if they receive Him at all--when He visits their house. This is a great shame, for He comes to give great good.

Thursday, July 24th - John 4:46,47

Previously when Jesus visited Cana He had miraculously provided a means of joy--wine at a wedding. But now one man had a much more serious need. About 25 miles from Cana a royal official, probably a member of Herod's Court, had a son who was dying. His money and position could do nothing to save the dear dying object of his love. He, like the Roman Centurion (cf. Mt. 8:5ff), and the ruler of the synagogue, Jairus (cf. Mk. 5:21ff), had been reduced to absolute need. But what blessed reduction! For there faith was born, seeing in Jesus the provision of life, even out of death.

Friday, July 25th - John 4:48,49

It may seem that Jesus is most insensitive here, as He makes this man's heartbreaking appeal the basis for instructing the man and those around him. Yet Jesus is not insensitive, nor is He quibbling. This man's perceived need, deep and agonizing though it were, was not his true need. What he needed was a deeper faith, more clearly focused on Jesus Himself. He needed faith like the Samaritans, who believed through words of testimony (cf. vv. 39,41). Such faith Jesus was drawing out of the man through this initial rebuff. His was a case similar to that of the Canaanite woman (cf. Mt. 15:21-28), and, like her, this man's faith grows to the point where it will not be refused. Divine resistance to our prayers often has such a design.

Saturday, July 26th - John 4:50

The distraught father in verse 49 actually issued an imperative for Jesus to come down to Capernaum to heal his son. Jesus answers with His own imperative: Go your way. This would seem to be a full and final refusal except that our Lord adds words of promise: Your son lives. The father's faith had grown to the point where he no longer needed to see Jesus at work, touching his son. His Word was enough. Is His Word sufficient for us? It should be more than sufficient.

Sunday, July 27th - John 4:51

Here we see that Jesus is as good as His Word. He speaks, and the deed is done. He did not need to go to Capernaum to lay hands on the ill child, although there are accounts of Him touching others. A Savior who has power to heal with His touch is wonderful. A Savior who has power to heal through His Word has much greater power--all power in heaven and earth, in fact.

Monday, July 28th - John 4:52

Think of the testing the father's faith endured as he left Jesus to return home with but a word from the Lord. Now that events clearly confirmed that word, the father reveals that he is still in a test of faith. That he does have faith is made clear as the father does not attribute the cure of his son to chance. Nor does he merely rejoice in his son's recovery, and, as did nine of the ten cleansed lepers (cf. Lk. 17:11-19), fail gratefully to acknowledge the Lord. He may have been tempted in these ways, but faith ever ascends to the Source of its blessing. Here it seeks to know the true magnitude of Jesus. Is He a prophet, who simply foretold this cure, or more than a prophet, whose word actually effected it?

Tuesday, July 29th - John 4:53

Unbelief distorts and suppresses true evidence (cf. Rom. 1:18ff), but faith rightly assesses and applies it. Here the father reaches a point where he not only believes the word of Jesus as it applied to his dying son (v. 50), but now he believes in Jesus Himself. In fact, Jesus had performed multiple healings on different levels. He had healed the son physically. The father, whose highest aim the previous day had been to see his son's life spared, even were he reduced to begging for it from Jesus, the Provider, now has his sights lifted above his son to the Son of God and eternal life in Him. This spiritual healing Jesus also worked, not only for the man, but also for his whole family. Here once more He gives far above what we can ask or think!

Wednesday, July 30th - John 4:54

The first sign (i.e. water into wine) showed Jesus as the source and provider of joy; the second sign shows Him to be the source of physical and eternal life. The second sign is more vital and fundamental. Our Lord only grows bigger as we follow His workings. He is willing and able to attend to our small needs, which we ourselves are incapable of fulfilling. He can transform dirty water into joy inspiring wine. He is also willing and able to attend to our greater needs, transforming our dying and impotence into eternal life for ourselves and our loved ones.

Thursday, July 31st - John 5:1-5

The Jews were celebrating a feast, probably Passover. This was an ordinance which Jesus attended, as He ever did with the ordinances of grace. At Jerusalem there also appeared to be a less regular means of common grace, namely the pool Bethesda. I believe that verse 4 is genuine, and that God, for a time, did dispatch an angel to stir the pool and provide healing for the first one in. There a multitude sat and lay in agony, each one waiting for a very slender chance to receive the mercy of physical healing. But our attention is drawn from the multitude to a certain man (v. 5) who seemed beyond the reach of either source of grace. Yet he was not beyond the reach of Jesus and His blessed power and loving mercy. We should never feel that we or any of our loved ones are beyond His caring reach.

Friday, August 1st - John 5:6,7

The question Jesus asks this man who had suffered so for thirty-eight years seems absurd. It seems strange that Jesus, knowing of this man's long-term suffering should pose it. Of course the man wanted to get well. Why else would he be there by this pool? However, note that the man does not give an unqualified yes in answer. He points to various seeming impediments to his healing. He was paralyzed not only in limb, but also had become so in his mind, thinking that his salvation was to be found in the pool. Yet our Lord is not confined to working through such limited means.

When Jesus asks us whether we would be healed, helped, led, used in His service, do we balk by pointing to obstacles? He is not concerned about them, but about us. The question is ever: Would you be healed? The how we must leave to Him.

Saturday, August 2nd - John 5:8,9

This poor man was commanded to do three things which, while he was a paralytic, were

impossible for him to do. Yet the One commanding him had power to infuse into the man, thus enabling him to effect the required action. The man had to believe and obey, both of which he did.

What God commands, He provides. Sometimes His commands seem impossible to us, but when we consider the power and grace of the One issuing them, we should be encouraged to believe that He will enable us to do the impossible through His infinite supply. Read Philippians 4:13,19 in this connection.

Sunday, August 3rd - John 5:9-12

We learn that this blessed miracle was performed on the Sabbath, which day was also a means of God's grace. But the Jewish leaders demonstrate their blindness, pettiness, and hardness of heart--in short, spiritual paralysis--when they see nothing in this miracle but what they suppose to be an impermissible action (v.10). They acknowledge neither the blessing of a shattered life restored to liberty and usefulness, nor the gracious power that wrought the change. For their Sabbath rest and all means of grace were negations, confining man to his misery. The devil would have us conceive of all of the ordinances of grace in such grim terms. We must not fall for such sinister schemes, but stand in the light, liberty, and power of Christ's grace.

Monday, August 4th - John 5:12,13

The cured man points to the One who had done such a miraculous work of love and power, and to His word of command as justification for carrying his pallet (v.11). Who is the man...? ask the malicious Jewish authorities. Notice the man they seek is not the one, ...who made you well, but rather the one who said, Take up your pallet, and walk. Such men do not seek a redeeming God to adore, but rather are seeking faults as grounds to accuse. Jesus avoids such men (v.13), and so should we (cf. Ps. 1:1,2; Rom. 16:17,18).

Tuesday, August 5th - John 5:14,15

Unlike the royal official in chapter 4:46-54, who became more taken up with the Son of Man than with the miracle itself, this fellow seems to have let Jesus slip away while he himself was taken up with his cure and the distractions of the Jews. Now he could not find Jesus, but our Lord knew how to find him, not only in locational terms (i.e., in the temple), but in spiritual terms (i.e. do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may befall you.). Here we learn that the man's sin had occasioned his long-term suffering. It can be the cause of ours, too (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-30). Jesus is well equipped to deal with sickness and sin, the fruit and root of our misery.

Wednesday, August 6th - John 5:15

This man goes away from Jesus, perhaps a bit offended by His faithful admonition. By his telling the Jews, he does seem to be guilty of the sins of ingratitude and indiscretion. Healed bodies do not always indicate healed, holy, and committed hearts. May we seek both healings from the Lord.

Thursday, August 7th - John 5:16

Was it wise or necessary for Jesus to have healed the man on the Sabbath? He had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. Surely another day's delay could be tolerated. Yet when

Jesus determines to bless, He will not be delayed by men's perverted scruples. Sin and Satan will dominate not one day, not one second longer when our Lord exerts His gracious power. You see this in Mark 3:1-6 also. Actually, the Sabbath was the perfect time for Jesus to exert his sovereign prerogative to vanquish the devil and his misery mongering. We should expect to be blessed on the Lord's day above all other days, despite what petty men would seek to make of it.

Friday, August 8th - John 5:17,18

Here we learn that Jesus delights to do His Father's will. We read earlier that such was His very food (cf. Jn. 4:34). It should be supremely encouraging for us to know that Jesus worked only with the Father's authorization and co-operation. For thus we know that our Redeemer's saving work is not only accepted by the Father, but also that it has its source in the Father. Both the Son and Father have worked with loving delight to save us. Yet such knowledge drove the Jewish leaders not only to persecute Jesus, but also to seek to kill Him. In Christ's saving work all men ultimately will see the supreme demonstration of divine love, or something they would kill, if they could. Praise the Lord that we have been enabled to see and embrace the former.

Saturday, August 9th - John 5:19,20

Though the Jews sought to kill Jesus, He did not respond to them in kind. Rather He sought to convince them of the truth that they might be saved. He does this by patiently revealing to His enemies more about the loving relationship which obtained between Himself and the Father. Whether any of them profited personally from such revelation we do not know. Yet we certainly profit as we learn that Jesus perfectly reveals to us the actions and dispositions of God the Father, what He does and how He loves His only begotten Son (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). Opposition to Christ provides opportunity for the Church to discover more deeply such spiritual treasures. Such has been the course of Church History.

Sunday, August 10th - John 5:19,20

Sometimes we may feel that whereas Jesus loves us, the Father may not; or at least that the Father may have some degree of reservation about loving us, more so than would His meek and mild Son. But Jesus here informs us that His loving, helping, healing, saving deeds are performed at the prompting of God the Father. Jesus knows and demonstrates perfectly God's saving will; He is perfectly loved by the Father, and in Him, so are we. When in glory we see the face of the Father (cf. Rev. 22:4), it shall be a lovingly smiling face.

Monday, August 11th - John 5:21-24

Jesus has stressed the loving bond between Himself and the Father, and also the fact that He acts ever in united concert with the Father. Now He goes on to indicate that such loving submission on His part indicates no inferiority to the Father. Jesus claims here to be equal with the Father in power (v.21), in authority (v.22), in glory (v.23), and claims to be the source of our eternal life (v.24).

When an important and powerful person speaks, we listen. These claims show Jesus to be the most important of persons, as new facets of His being and action open up to us. This

is My beloved Son, hear Him. We should. Our eternal destinies depend on it.

Tuesday, August 12th - John 5:24

Jesus does not ask us fully to understand the propositions He has been setting out regarding His deity. It is not that such claims are irrational, but rather that they surpass reason, being suprarational. Thus it is not by reason that we are saved, but by faith. It is by faith that we hear His word with understanding, leading to trust and obedience. This in turn leads us away from judgment, out of death, and into eternal life.

Wednesday, August 13th - John 5:25-29

The Word of Christ brings life out of death (cf. Eph. 2:1-7), renewing our hearts and minds, and transforming our characters. But that word has power to call dead bodies, most of which will be decayed by the ravages of centuries, back to life (cf. Rom.8:11). For those united to Christ by faith, such a resurrection will be one of glorious, eternal life. Unbelievers, whose lives bear the sour fruit of sin, experience resurrection, too, but theirs is a resurrection unto judgment.

We have all yet to enter into the final and fullest aspect of our eternal destinies. There are only two eternal and infinitely different destinations for all people. How we relate to Christ determines which will be ours.

Thursday, August 14th - John 5:28,29

Our relation to Christ and to God the Father through Him can never be a bare intellectual notion if we are to be saved. We must not only perceive His word, but must also embrace it by faith (v.24). Such an embracing brings delight in our doing the Father's will. Good deeds, obedient actions thus accumulate as fruit of our new life in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:10; Rev. 19:8). That is the implicit challenge found in Jesus representing our deeds as being the basis of our judgment (v.29).

Knowing the truth has never saved anyone. The devil knows it all (cf. Jas. 2:19). The gracious power of Christ enables us to live the truth.

Friday, August 15th - John 5:30-32

The extent and depth of what Jesus has been saying are beyond human comprehension. For He has been revealing to us the unity of essence and the distinction of Persons in the Trinity. All of this has been said in defense of the charge that He made Himself equal with God (v.18). In short He accepts the claim and has supported it. However, witnesses are now cited to confirm His testimony.

C. S. Lewis has said that no one would make the claims Christ did unless he were a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. A liar or lunatic could easily make such claims, but only the true and living Lord could produce credible witnesses to substantiate them.

Saturday, August 16th - John 5:33-35

The Jewish accusers of Jesus had recognized a degree of godly authority in John the Baptist and had responded to that (cf. Mt. 3:7ff). Here our Lord condescends by urging them to recall the joy they had under John's ministry, as John testified about the coming Messiah (cf. Mt. 3:11,12). Should they now be so shocked over the fact that their Messiah had indeed come? Their salvation depended on their taking seriously once more

the witness of John, whose testimony was absolutely true. Sometimes the salvation of others depends on our testimony. May we be likewise true.

Sunday, August 17th - John 5:36

A greater witness to Christ's deity than the words of John were the works of Jesus Himself. Neither a lunatic nor a liar could do what He had done. Only God could change water into wine, heal a man's dying son, and cure a paralytic. Jesus must have been the God/man, for only God could perform such divine deeds. If men could not accept the testimony of such works, what on earth could the Messiah do to convince them? But our faith is well founded, not only on words, but also on inimitable works.

Monday, August 18th - John 5:37,38

The witness of the Father is added to that of the works of Jesus and the words of John. How had the Father borne witness of Jesus? We might think of the voice of God at Jesus' baptism (cf. Mt. 3:17), although perhaps none of the accusers had heard that. In fact, Jesus states that God's witness was neither audible nor visible, but rather was given through His word. In Scripture we have the revealed witness of no one less than God Himself. The Father is an impeccable witness for His Son. Only those whose hearts have disregard for God and His revelation--whatever their lips may proclaim to the contrary--will reject the Son whom He has sent.

Tuesday, August 19th - John 5:39

This verse presents a great truth and makes a vital distinction. The truth is that Christ is in all of the Bible. Every page, line, word of Scripture somehow testifies to Christ, either by showing us our need for redemption in Him, God's provision of redemption in Him, its application by the Holy Spirit, or teaching about our life and service in Christ. Thus we should have highest regard and hunger for the whole counsel of God as given in Scripture.

The vital distinction is that whereas the Bible speaks of eternal life, that is not really what the Word is about. Those seeking eternal life as a mere commodity will never find it even by studying Scripture. For the Word is about Christ and eternal life in Him. We must ultimately search for Christ, whom to know is eternal life (cf. Jn. 17:3).

Wednesday, August 20th - John 5:40-47

Jesus was addressing Jewish leaders and thus summoned witnesses to His deity whom they should have respected. Had He been speaking with Gentiles He could have summoned such witnesses as the creation itself (cf. Rom. 1:18-23). All of these witnesses testify for our good, as they point to our need of salvation and God's provision of it in His Son. But if we do not see our need, and have regard only for things of this passing, corrupt and corrupting life, such witnesses stand to accuse us.

In the final analysis men reject Christ out of willing refusal (v.40), rather than from lack of reasonable evidence. They determine to live in death, consciously struggling against the tide of these witnesses. They are without excuse for this. But we seek no excuse but rather we embrace this great Redeemer, and our faith is strengthened by such a cloud of witnesses (cf. Heb. 12:1-3).

Thursday, August 21st - Acts 2: 38

There are three elements contained in this verse, and these elements have individually and collectively been subject to considerable misunderstanding and misguided teaching. The first element is repentance. Peter speaks in the imperative, telling those who had been convicted by his sermon, and had asked for direction to repent (metanohvsate). The word, repent (metavnoia), implies a complete revolution of the mind, entire adoption of new principles and practices--a change of character and conduct. When it is correctly understood how thoroughly incapable the natural man is to perform such a change--he being dead in sin (Eph. 2:1), and consequently unwilling and unable to repent--it will then be correctly understood that repentance is a fruit issuing from a regenerate nature, and not the root of that nature.

Friday, August 22nd - Acts 2: 38

The second element contained in this verse is baptism. Some assert that because repentance is set before baptism the New Testament teaches that only believers capable of demonstrating their regeneration are proper subjects of baptism. Those so restricting the subjects of baptism to repentant believers usually insist that the mode of baptism be derived from the word, baptize (baptivzw) rather than its meaning as here expressed in Scripture. Though the original, primary meaning of the term may have been to immerse, it does not follow that the scriptural connotation is that, any more than it would follow that scriptural use of presbyter (presbuvteroV) connotes age, or deacon (diavkonoV) connotes a servant.

The meaning of baptism must govern our understanding of its subjects and mode. Peter states nothing about water, as the agent of baptism, but he rather says that baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ. That is to say that one is brought into vital union with the revealed person and work of the Son of God, who became man to save His people from their sins (Mt. 1:21). Thus, baptism represents the application to one's life of the authority and saving power of the anointed, divine Savior. The result of such vital union is remission of sins.

Since most, if not all, of those hearing Peter's sermon on that day were Jews, who were familiar with the purifying essence of baptism, and especially were familiar with the tie between repentance and remission of sins taught in John's baptism (Mk. 1:4), they would have easily understood the meaning of such baptism, and would not have erroneously thought that the amount of the agent representing such cleansing was essential to the rite.

Saturday, August 23rd - Acts 2: 38

The third element of this verse is the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Some maintain that such a reception follows repentance and baptism, for, it is maintained, the gift of the Holy Spirit is held out as a future prospect when Peter employs the future tense. Yet the apostle's call for repentance and baptism is in the imperative, which has no temporal force. It is thus best to understand these three elements as being components of a complex whole. All of those repenting and being baptised in the name of Jesus Christ receive the Holy Spirit as the permanently indwelling and empowering endowment of the heavenly Father. Salvation is entirely a gift of God, and while the elements of that divine gift may be distinguished, they cannot be separated. If one is truly baptized in Christ, he is truly baptized in and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

Sunday, August 24th - Acts 2: 38, 39

Peter delivers in most concentrated form the essence of salvation in these verses. He mentions repentance as a change of attitude and action from being hostile and contemptuous toward Christ to being completely submissive to His saving authority and power, as represented by baptism. Such a change of life is prompted and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who brings conviction, works regeneration, gives faith--all as what may be termed the effectual calling of the Lord God. The promise of this new life had for centuries been offered to the Jews, God's covenant people. That the promise still is offered covenantally is evident by Peter's declaring that it belongs to believers and to their children (hence, children of believers are proper subjects for baptism). But the promise extends beyond national Israel--to all who are far off, namely, to elect Gentiles.

All those truly repenting, being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit do so not as a result of their own desiring, deserving, or endeavor, but rather as a result of the effectual calling of God. Salvation is, from its planning, its accomplishment, and its application, completely of the Lord. Thus let all who repent know that they do so not by their own feeble and changeable efforts, but by the grace and power of the Lord, whose goodness begins and whose power completes such saving work for and in His people.

Monday, August 25th - Acts 2: 40

We have the concentrated essence of Peter's sermon in vv. 14-39. In this verse we learn that the apostle's sermon was neither brief nor simple. He apparently spoke at some length, explaining and amplifying the essential truths, not so as to dilute them, but rather to demonstrate their universal applicability. The preaching consisted of two components: exposition and exhortation. The former is the authoritative declaration of the truth, the later is the urging of its application to the lives of those hearing the truth expounded. The vital aim of such preaching was salvation. Men were not, by this apostle, entertained, intellectually enlightened, or comforted in their current dispositions. They were

summoned to be saved from that sinful perversity into which all people are born and in which, apart from the saving grace of God, they dwell in a living death.

Tuesday, August 26th - Acts 2: 41

This verse implies one truth and makes explicit another. The implied truth is most sobering. It is that not all who heard Peter's sermon received its saving power. Many more were called than were chosen. The explicit truth is that about three thousand did receive the message and essence of salvation. The conversion of this multitude as a result of one sermon was a work greater than what Jesus Himself ever did through His preaching. Jesus foretold that this would result from the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling His apostles (Jn. 14:12). The three thousand were baptized, and certainly received themselves the gift of the Holy Spirit according to the promise (vv. 38,39). Yet we do not read here of miraculous manifestations such as tongues of fire or people speaking in other tongues as occurred in Acts 2:1-4. There were, however, other evidences, more substantial though less demonstrative, that these converts were baptized in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How they lived after their baptism and joining of the Church tells that tale.

Wednesday, August 27th - Acts 2: 42

It was not spectacle but spiritual substance into which the new converts were baptized. The demonstration of this we find in this verse, which gives us the true evidence of Holy Spirit baptism. The newly baptized believers manifest a hunger and thirst for the means of God's grace. With strong and consistent attendance they gave themselves to the apostles' teaching, wherein the whole counsel of God was expounded and applied. Conversion is but the beginning of a life of learning about, relying upon, and living out the infinite, potent, and precious riches of redemption.

Thursday, August 28th - Acts 2: 42

Redemption reconciles not only sinful people to a holy God, but also reconciles sinfully selfish people to each other. Thus, we read of the members of the infant Church devoting themselves to fellowship. No one thought of himself as being redeemed to an independent walk. Love for the brethren bound each convert to his fellow convert, and such love was not merely professed, but was practiced in cheerful corporate gatherings where each believer sought to honor other members of the body above himself (Phil. 2:3). Where men profess to love God but show no love for the brethren something is badly wrong (1 Jn. 4:20, 21).

Friday, August 29th - Acts 2: 42

In addition to the preaching of God's Word and fellowship, the celebration of the sacraments serves as a means of sanctifying grace. We saw baptism, the initiatory rite, practiced in precious verses. Here we learn that the sustaining sacrament, the Lord's Supper, was also consistently administered. Thus, believers were nourished as they fed upon Christ audibly administered through the teaching ministry of the Word, and visually and tangibly administered through the sacraments. Fullest provision is made by God for the maintenance and nurture of spiritual life in the Church.

Saturday, August 30th - Acts 2: 42

Prayer also characterizes the private and corporate lives of the redeemed and regenerate. In the Word and sacraments, God addresses His people; in fellowship, the saints act as iron sharpening iron as they interact together; in prayer, the children of God address their heavenly Father. In prayer, believers gratefully and lovingly express praise and thanksgiving to their redeeming God, while humbly offering to their providing Father their supplications and intercessions. Through the preaching of the Word and celebration of the sacraments believers submit themselves to the doctrine of God, in fellowship they submit themselves to one another in Christ (Eph. 5:21), and in prayer they submit their lives to the disposal of God. It is worth noting what John Calvin writes about the corporate nature of the prayers here recorded: "It is certain that he is speaking about public prayer. Therefore, it is not enough for men to make their prayers at home by themselves, unless they all assemble together to pray; in this also consists the profession of faith." (New Testament Commentaries, vol. 6, p. 86).

Sunday, August 31st - Acts 2: 43

Luke records literally that fear (fobov) came to every soul. For believers, such fear was godly awe. The amazement they experienced on Pentecost and the conviction they experienced under Peter's sermon were not transient feelings. Reverence is not inconsistent with joyful fellowship and growth in grace, but rather is an essential component of such blessings (Ps. 2:11). Unbelievers, too, apparently felt fear, which restrained their opposition to the gospel and to the apostles who were, by God's grace and power, doing wonders which no man could do or could resist. God-inspired fear draws the redeemed closer to the Lord, and keeps their enemies at bay from them.

Monday, September 1st - Acts 2: 44, 45

We have noted that such things as consistent attendance upon the means of grace (vv. 41, 42), and the nurture of reverence (v. 43) are true marks of the work of the Holy Spirit in believers. In these verses another such mark is noted. Loving unity is a hallmark of Spirit-filled believers. The essence of such unity is spiritual, and its foundation and sustenance is doctrinal, but it will also manifest itself materially. When the children of God truly have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:1-8), they do not hold themselves or their possessions aloof from their brethren. Instead, they freely and generously give themselves and give of themselves for the sake of the family of faith. Yet, while we note this beautiful and beneficial example of love and spiritual unity, we must guard against misunderstanding. First, we must resist thinking of this example as a naive and irresponsible extreme, for to do so gives us a cloak with which to cover our lack of love and our selfish greed. But we must also guard against thinking that this extraordinary example of communion is to be the norm found in every quarter of the church in every age. It is possible for rash souls to endeavor to ape this mutual giving while lacking the heart that prompts it. Neither legal demand, nor loveless, begrudging giving, nor a compelled relinquishment can compare with the freely giving sacrifice of a Christ-like people.

Tuesday, September 2nd - Acts 2: 46, 47

The spiritual unity, which was the root of the physical community noted previously (vv. 44, 45), is noted in these verses. Because they were of one mind, the believers shared their material possessions. Their unity was not a mere temporary, mental agreement or functional contract, but resulted from their regenerate hearts constantly and sincerely worshipping and gratefully praising God, who had made them in Christ to be new creatures, bound together by ties of liberating truth and sweetest love. Believers who truly worship God do not work independently of each other.

Wednesday, September 3rd - Acts 2: 46, 47

The priority of worship over work and even over personal and family life should be noted in these verses. These believers made their daily attendance in the temple to be paramount, not because they adhered to the shadows of ceremonial types, but because the temple was the starting place from which the Church spread to cover the earth. In the temple the believers partook of the substance of their salvation through the means of grace there administered by the apostles (v. 42). Then, they carried their religion into their homes, as there, too, they grouped together for worship and fellowship. When we make our attendance in God's house a priority, our own houses become filled with the sweet satisfaction of His grace. If we put our own houses first, both they and God's house will fall into disrepair.

Thursday, September 4th - Acts 2: 46, 47

It should be noted that it was as the believers gave themselves to the right worship of God that new members were added to the Church. There is no indication that the apostles or the other believers were much taken up with techniques of evangelistic outreach. Still less do we read of them turning the Church into a user friendly nurturing center for the unconverted. Rather, their primary concern was with the pure and right worship of the Lord, and as they endeavored to be so heavenly minded (Col. 3:1-4), they served to draw the attention of others to that place to which their vision was raised, and to the divine Person upon whom their hearts were set. Our lights shine most clearly and winsomely when we look up to the source of that light, which we but reflect (Mt. 5:16), not when we look out upon the darkness of the world and the misery of its inhabitants.

Friday, September 5th - Acts 2: 46, 47

Although the fruits of sanctification, manifested in the lives of these worshipping saints, served instrumentally to draw others to the Lord, it was the Lord Himself whose effectual calling was the ultimate cause of their conversion and commitment to the family of faith. Yet, while we rightly ascribe all glory in this to God, we must not despise the instrument of the body of Christ. John Calvin comments on the remark about the addition to the Church of those who were being saved: "He teaches that this is the way of obtaining salvation, that we should be admitted into the Church. For outside of it, just as there is no forgiveness of sins, neither is there hope of eternal life." (New Testament Commentaries, vol. 6, p. 90). The body of Christ points others to her Head, while the Head embraces others in His body.

Saturday, September 6th - Acts 3: 1

With the opening of the third chapter, Luke begins to relate how the gospel and the Church spread abroad. Both the external pressures of persecution and the internal promptings of missionary zeal served to propagate the message of salvation and extend the domain of the body of Christ. Such vast, strategic movements were the fruits of answered prayers. God both draws and drives His servants when they ask to be used in His service.

Sunday, September 7th - Acts 3: 1

We have in Peter and John a prime example of the unity of the spirit noted in 2:46. These two men were different from each other in almost every natural way. However, they were bound together by a supernatural affinity. From this point onward they become almost

inseparable. What clearly makes them so is their common devotion to their Lord, as expressed in their going to the temple to pray. As they together walk in the path of such devotion to God, they find themselves led by God into the path of merciful duty toward their needy fellow man. Fruitful duty for Christ always follows faithful devotion to Christ.

Monday, September 8th - Acts 3: 2, 3

The Holy Spirit inspired Luke to select one of the many apostolic miracles (2:43), to record for the instruction and edification of the Lord's people. Peter and John were not the only ones going to the temple that day and at that hour. A man with a handicap which had afflicted him all of his life was being carried to the temple as well. Yet, whereas the apostles went to worship God, the man went to beg alms from men. Thus, this man serves to represent the many who are without the liberty, power, and treasures of salvation, who are paralyzed by their burden of sin, yet who are reduced to seeking and expecting no more from the Church than some of the transient trinkets of this world. The Lord demonstrates through His servants that He has far more than that to give.

Tuesday, September 9th - Acts 3: 2, 3

We are not perhaps wrong in assuming that the lame man did offer prayer of sorts. If his thoughts did ascend to God, his words make clear to us their theme, namely, that God would stir His people with liberality for the poor and needy. Accordingly, we find the man petitioning other men for tokens to provide his physical sustenance. He had no faith or hope to think, ask, or expect any help for the most obvious need of his lameness or for the more serious need of his being dead in trespasses and sin. But God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were without strength to ask for or think of a remedy for our congenital sin sickness, He gave us a full and free redemption in Christ (Rom. 5:6-8).

Wednesday, September 10th - Acts 3: 4-6

When Peter and John fixed their gaze upon the man, they did so, no doubt, in faith so as not only to see the man in his obvious need, but to see him as far as possible as the Lord saw him. In this way the apostles teach us that a true perspective of men and situations is gained only as we behold them through the perspective of the Lord.

Thursday, September 11th - Acts 3: 4-6

With the words, Look at us, Peter commands the poor cripple's attention. But what does the man receive as he so gives his attention? Peter issues a disclaimer when he says that he and John were without money. Think how that would have dashed the man's expectations! But the Lord does not always give His servants material abundance (Phil. 4:12,13). Such provision in this case only would have served as means to sustain a man in his impotence. What God denies to and through His servants is only so that something infinitely more excellent may be given. What is gold when compared with one's being set on pilgrimage to glory?

Friday, September 12th - Acts 3: 6

Peter may have lacked what the man wanted, but he did not lack what the man needed. The apostle possessed two things which he would convey: 1) a valuable miracle which would be precious for all time, and 2) the substance of which the miracle was but a sign, namely, new life in Christ, which would be infinitely precious for eternity. We may not be instrumental in dispensing such signs of an apostle, but we do have the substance to convey as we, through the word of the gospel, call on men dead in sin to rise in the name of Jesus Christ and walk in newness of life, love, and sanctifying power.

Saturday, September 13th - Acts 3: 6

The command for a cripple to walk is a cruel mockery, unless power to walk is conferred with the command. Likewise, the call for dead sinners to live is mockery unless life is given through such a call. No mockery was made in either instance on that day at that ninth hour when Peter commanded the cripple in the name of Jesus to walk. No mockery is made when in the name of Jesus we today call upon men dead in sin to live.

Sunday, September 14th - Acts 3: 7, 8

These verses portray to us the efficacy of the divine command issued through Peter, as well as the fruit of faith which was borne in and exercised by the lame man. To Peter's word of command there is added a physical gesture which betokens that what God commands through His Word He also provides. Peter pulls the man up by his hand. Had there been no power in the apostle's word, the man would immediately have collapsed. Instead, we behold efficacious power in the Word of God. As for the man himself, we are explicitly told of effect, implicitly told of cause in his restoration. For the strengthening of his previously lifeless limbs is the effect of his exercise of the gift of faith. The faith of the man's new heart moved prior to the movement of his legs. He believed that in Christ he could do what Christ's apostle ordered, and it was so. The cripple stood, walked, and leaped with new legs empowered by his newly given and exercised faith.

Monday, September 15th - Acts 3: 8

The crippled man not only walked, but he leaped for joy. He thus shows himself possessed of a complete restoration of body. To strength is added immediate agility, so that henceforth the man need not beg from others. He was able to walk and work and so earn his own living. He could do more than that, and shows that he would do more than that. His leaping goes beyond the sort of locomotion necessary for fruitful service; it is a demonstration of grateful joy in the gift of God. We know this not only by his leaping, but more by the speech of his mouth. The lips which once were employed in pleading the man's impotence and begging for sustenance from men, now express thanksgiving and praise to God, testifying that salvation from sin and suffering is from the Lord. The beggar therefore becomes immediately a giver of thanks to God and saving testimony to man--all signifying to us that Jesus saves to the uttermost.

Tuesday, September 16th - Acts 3: 9, 10

The effect of this miraculous healing extended beyond the lame man himself. The attention of all the people round about was arrested. Suddenly it was apparent to all that there was more to the temple and worship therein than empty ritual. The shadows and nominal features of the house of God were thus seen in a new way, as containing substance and saving power. For the man healed and for many others the name, Beautiful Gate, would be forever more than an arbitrary designation. When the Lord makes effectual His means of grace, we behold life, health, and peace powerfully issuing from those means.

Wednesday, September 17th - Acts 3: 11, 12

These verses show us the limitations of miracles. They have power only to amaze those witnessing them. They have no saving or edifying effect without doctrine which indicates their true nature and significance. Therefore, we find Peter teaching the people after they had witnessed the healing effect of the apostle's touch. The first point of Peter's teaching is a personal disclaimer. He tells them that he was not the source of the restoring power, as they supposed in their spiritual blindness and dullness. Men's vague amazement, ignorant superstition, and vain idolatry all must be vanquished before they can see and accept the truth.

Thursday, September 18th - Acts 3: 13-15

Peter points from himself (the instrument) to God (the worker). The apostle makes clear that the source of this merciful work of power was the God of Israel, whom they claimed to worship. Their God was no mere ancient ideal or tradition, but was a living, almighty Savior. Moreover, Peter stresses that the covenant God of Israel conveys His blessing only through the person and work of His Son, Jesus. Accordingly, the focus is moved from the fruit of salvation to the Savior Himself. Only when men look in humble faith to this root of all blessing can they expect to have its fruit.

Friday, September 19th - Acts 3: 13-15

Peter drives home to the hearts and consciences of the people the monstrous magnitude of their sin and the tragic perversion of their priorities. He tells them that they had delivered up Jesus, as though they were all traitors, like Judas; that they disowned before pagan Pilate the One who came as King of the Jews to the Jews; that they did so without cause or need, for Pilate was disposed to release Jesus; that they preferred having in their midst a convicted murderer, who had demonstrated his power and inclination not to save and heal, but to destroy life; that they embraced this murderer in place of the Holy and Righteous One of God, the sum and source of all blessing, honor, glory, and power in time and eternity; and, finally, that they did not only reject Jesus, but put Him to death, who was the Prince of Life, the agent of creation and accomplisher of redemption. But though they did their worst, God did His best in raising Christ from the dead. In this most plain, penetrating, and convicting way, the apostle tells the people, in a sense, what he told the man, that he had neither means nor desire to sustain them in such criminal and crippling sin, but that he could point to a way out of it.

Saturday, September 20th - Acts 3: 16

Peter sums up his opening remarks to the people with respect to the nature, source, and significance of the healing miracle they had just witnessed. The ultimate source was the name of Jesus, not a mere designation mechanically pronounced as an incantation, but the revealed person and work of the saving Son of God humbly and reverently invoked. The proximate, or instrumental, source of the healing was the man's faith in the name of Jesus. By Peter's attributing such faith to the man, we know that the poor, lame soul received more than physical restoration. Faith in Jesus Christ asks for and expects the highest form of healing. Whenever anyone who is crippled and impotently reduced to a living death by the burden of sin calls believingly upon the name of Jesus, the Savior hears and gives perfect health, in body and soul, for time and eternity.

Sunday, September 21st - Acts 3: 17-19

Peter speaks generously when he tells his hearers that he knows they committed their monumental sin and enormous crime of crucifying Jesus in ignorance. The apostle also

speaks sympathetically, for he himself had been ignorantly instrumental in bringing satanic opposition against his Lord (Mt. 16:21-23). Jesus intimates that those who crucified Him knew not what they did (Lk. 23:34), and Paul refers to the same ignorance when he tells the Corinthians that had the rulers of this age understood what they were doing with Jesus, they would not have crucified Him (1 Cor. 2:8). But while ignorance may extenuate guilt, it does not excuse or expiate guilt. Indeed, such ignorance is a facet of divine judgment upon man's sinful suppression of the truth (Rom. 1:18,28). Therefore, Peter calls for his hearers to repent, taking full responsibility for their sin and turning to the saving provision of God in Christ. No one shall escape the judgment and wrath of God who ignores and neglects this gracious Savior (Heb. 2:3).

Monday, September 22nd - Acts 3: 18, 19

Men were fully responsible for their crime of crucifying Christ. Yet, in the death of the Son of God there was a higher hand at work. God sinlessly used the sin of duped men and driving devils to accomplish something He had long before promised and recorded in Scripture. By divine ordaining, Christ suffered to relieve His people of their burden of sin and suffering. By His wounds, we are healed; by His death, we live (Is. 53:4-12). The apostle declares that while men and devils did their worst, God through their efforts was performing His best for His people. The Lord did this not for show, but actually to save men from their sins. Thus, Peter exhorts men to repent, as he had done in an earlier sermon (2:38), and he further calls for them to convert (επιστρέψατε) from their careers of sins great and small, which served only to weary them and cause them misery. Such turning would be away from sin and to the Savior, who gives rest to repentant sinners (Mt. 11:28-30), and who ushers repentant converts into the joyful presence and pleasures of the Lord (Ps. 16:11), from whom such salvation has issued.

Tuesday, September 23rd - Acts 3: 19,20

Peter states a sublime truth when he tells his hearers that when they repent, the God whom they offended by their sin will send Jesus, against whom they committed sin and crime. The coming of Jesus to such offenders would be a terrible prospect, except that the apostle declares that Jesus would come not against but for them. Christ, the one most directly injured by the sins of these Jews, would be sent for their benefit. Christ, the divine Judge, would come as their compassionate and effectual Advocate. If Christ is for us, who can stand against us?

Wednesday, September 24th - Acts 3: 19-21

There are two senses in which God sends Jesus for repentant believers. First, He sends the Spirit of His Son with the virtues and potencies of His redeeming work through the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-18,26; 15:26; Rom. 8:9). Finally, God sends Jesus at His second coming, not to Judge His people, but to perfect their redemption (Heb. 9:27,28). The initial sending of Jesus by the Holy Spirit inaugurates the decisive and progressive restoration of all things in the hearts of individual believers, in the Church, and in the world (Ps. 2). The final sending of Jesus consummates redemption and conveys the fullness and perfection of the blessing and glory of the Lord's kingdom to His people. Incalculable blessing for believers attends the sending of Jesus for us, now and forever.

Thursday, September 25th - Acts 3: 19-21

The word in v.21 translated, restoration, (apokatastasew) not only has the sense of replenishing a depleted supply, but primarily has the sense of something being made to stand from its fallen state. Sin has both impoverished and prostrated us. Christ enriches us with heavenly blessings which outshine and outlive this world (Jn. 4:13,14; 1 Jn. 2:17), and He raises us up to stand as more than conquerors on earth and as beloved, perfected children of God in heaven.

Friday, September 26th - Acts 3: 22

Here Peter, for the fifth time in Acts, cites Scripture as the basis and support for what he maintains. His citations are drawn from the Psalms (cf. Acts 1:20 and Ps. 69:25; 109:8; Acts 2:25ff and Ps. 16:8-11; Acts 2:34ff and Ps. 110:1), from the prophets (cf., Acts 2:16ff and Joel 2:28-32), and now he cites from the law (cf. Dt. 18:15,19). By his clear reliance upon Scripture, Peter shows himself to be following the example of Jesus (Mt. 4:4,7,10) and relying upon the revealed Word of God and not the opinions of men (2 Pet. 1:16-21). The more we consult and communicate to others the Word of God, the more clearly we and they will see that Christ is God's final, prophetic Word to man (Heb. 1:1-4), and that Christ is greater than Moses (Heb. 3:1-6), who predicted, by divine inspiration, the coming of Jesus.

Saturday, September 27th - Acts 3: 22, 23

The Savior whom the Apostle Peter preaches and the salvation offered through such preaching result not from men's speculations, but rather they represent the provision of God for needy sinners. As the divinely provided Prophet, Priest (or Savior), and King (or Lord), Christ is not proclaimed as an entertaining spectacle. He is the only One through whom we know God, have peace with God, and obey acceptably our God. Therefore,

Peter cites the terms of men's relating to Christ as set down by Moses in God's Word. Either men obey Christ in all that He says, or they shall be excommunicated from the fellowship of God's people and banished from the blessed presence of the Lord (Mt. 7:21-23).

Sunday, September 28th - Acts 3: 24

Moses was not alone in predicting the coming of Christ. Peter declares that all of the prophets in some measure point to Christ. Thus, when he urges his Jewish hearers to be converted to Jesus, who had fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, Peter was not advocating their rebellion from the Law and prophets but rather their complete acceptance of what Moses and the prophets taught. Peter was doing with these Jews what the resurrected Jesus had done with his two disconsolate disciples on the Emmaus road, namely, showing how Moses and all the prophets tell the tale of redemption and of Christ, the Redeemer (Lk. 24:25-27). Indeed, while the prophets predicted coming events such as divine chastisement for Israel's sin, the major theme of their prophetic ministries concerned Christ (1 Pet. 1:10,11). A true reading and understanding of the prophets will yield a clear portrait of Christ, not some sort of arcane eschatological scheme.

Monday, September 29th - Acts 3: 25, 26

The repentance for which Peter had called in v.19 is by these verses shown to be neither a call to some novel way of living, nor a summons to acknowledge a strange deity. The Jews here addressed were not merely students of the prophets, as though they happened to have only an intellectual interest in the prophets. They were the sons of the prophets, descended from members of the covenant community from which the prophets had been raised up by God. They, moreover, were sons of the covenant God had made with Abraham, the Lord having explicitly bound Himself by promise to be not only Abraham's God, but also the God of His children. For them God sent and raised up His Son to save them from their sins. The summons to Christ came to them by the lovingly specific design of their God. Nothing in all the world should have been more natural than for them to embrace their Messiah.

Tuesday, September 30th - Acts 3: 25, 26

Peter, in expressing to the Jews the explicit design that the gospel was for them, was saying more than even he, at the time, realized. For Christ came first to the Jews, but not only to them. Members from all the families of the earth would in time find themselves objects of the divine love and design of redemption (Eph. 1:4-6). This lesson would come later more clearly and fully to Peter himself (Acts 10:1ff, especially vv. 28,42,43).

Wednesday, October 1st - Acts 4: 1,2

At this point the Book of Acts recounts a new feature attending the ministry of the Apostles. Opposition is aroused. In Acts 2:13 there was ridicule, but this is more serious. The authorities become involved, and their reaction to the gospel is very different from that of the many who were being saved. By their reaction, we learn that a great division is generated by men preaching Christ. Though all men are sinners, not all sinners embrace the Savior. Satan, who in paradise cast aspersions upon the love, power, and veracity of God, does not cease to oppose God's anointed Redeemer, who would lead men out of this world made a wilderness by their sin. If apostles, preaching faithfully and lovingly the name of Jesus and salvation in His name, encountered such opposition, should we be surprised by fiery ordeals which come upon us in our endeavors to serve Christ (1 Pet. 4:12-14)?

Thursday, October 2nd - Acts 4: 1, 2

If we try to view this matter as objectively as possible, we should be amazed that Peter and John encountered this opposition. What threat did the apostles pose? They had preached Christ in deed, through the beneficent healing miracle performed on the lame man. They had thus served to bless the man, not to threaten or injure him or anyone else. Then they preached Christ in word through Peter's sermon, wherein all were called upon to profit from the miracle by their faith in Christ and repentant walk in new life. Again, they offered blessing to all, injury to none. Yet, they were opposed, and by men we would expect to be leading the people toward, not away from, the salvation of God. The Jewish religious authorities were disturbed that the apostles were teaching salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. With them, the Sadducees--the rationalists, who did not believe in angels, miracles, or the resurrection--objected to the apostles proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. Such opposition by the Sadducees had already been shown by Jesus to be irrational (Mt. 22:23-33). Yet, against reason, their religious profession, and leadership position, these authorities move against the servants of Christ. But it is those who array themselves against the Lord and His anointed and His servants who will be finally and fully vanquished (Ps. 2:1-5, 10-12).

Friday, October 3rd - Acts 4: 1-3

It may appear, in the initial stages of conflict, that the opponents of the Lord have the upper hand. They held the seats of institutional power. They exercised that power in arresting and imprisoning Peter and John. We must learn that faithful service for Christ becomes costly, and can often appear as something bound to be defeated. Yet, though darkness descends and the cause of Christ appears locked in a dungeon, we must not

believe that God has left the field of contest simply because He seems not to be there. The Lord turns the imprisonments of His servants into liberating power for them and for others, while He ordains that the seeming liberty and abuse of authority exercised by the enemies of the gospel serve as rope with which they ultimately hang themselves.

Saturday, October 4th - Acts 4: 1-4

The messengers of God were imprisoned, but there is no power which can imprison the message of salvation (2 Tim. 2:9). In spite of the authorities arresting Peter and John, many believed the word they preached. Indeed, many may have been persuaded to believe because of their imprisonment. For the authorities filled their jail with men who were filled with the Holy Spirit (v.8). The Spirit-empowered way the apostles bore their arrest and imprisonment could not have failed to move many rightly to conclude that they would be freer with Christ in prison than they would be without Him out of prison. Thus, the stronghold of Satan lost many souls, as nearly two thousand (compare v. 4 with 2:41) were released from their bondage to sin and Satan and were added to the household and holy temple of the living God (Eph. 2:19-22).

Sunday, October 5th - Acts 4: 5-7

The situation for Peter and John grew darker on the morning after the night they spent in jail. They were taken out of jail only to be placed amidst men who formed a veritable synagogue of Satan. The court before which the two apostles were arraigned was the Sanhedrin--the very court which had recently sentenced Jesus to death. Peter and John were made to feel small and insignificant before them. They were placed in the center, surrounded by all the Jewish leaders of note: rulers, elders, scribes, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, who gave the infernal counsel that Jesus should be put to death (Jn. 11:49-53), and two named John and Alexander, about whom we know nothing except that they were notable men in their day. The way they were questioned was also calculated to make the apostles feel small. The Greek word order places the pronoun, you, at the very end of the question posed in v.7, an indication of scornful reference. What chance did two fishermen-turned-preachers have against such an imposing assembly of rulers? There are times when it seems that all the powers of hell are arrayed against isolated servants of Christ. But greater is He who is in us than all men and devils who are against us.

Monday, October 6th - Acts 4: 5-7

Critical readers of Scripture note an apparent contradiction between Luke designating Annas the high priest, and other gospel writers designating Caiaphas as filling that office (Mt. 26:3; Jn. 11:49). However, careful readers note in this an inherent flaw and

weakness in the authority of Jewish rule in the days of the apostles. According to God's Word, the high priest was to serve for life (Num. 35:28). But at the time Luke wrote high priests were deposed and appointed not by divine authority, but by the caprice of their Roman overlords. The Jewish leaders consented to this out of their fear of offending Rome. Josephus, the Jewish historian, thus records that five sons of Annas were named high priest in addition to Annas himself and his son-in-law Caiaphas. Accordingly, Luke names Annas and Caiaphas co-high priests in his Gospel (Lk. 3:2). From this we may detect how the Sanhedrin no longer stood on the basis of absolute, divine authority, but rather derived its power from the pagan caprice of Rome. Worldlings may put on a brave and threatening face, but at heart they are powerless cowards.

Tuesday, October 7th - Acts 4: 7-10

The Jewish leaders mustered all of their power against the two apparently hapless disciples of the crucified Jesus. Then, amidst such a show of force, the two were asked by what power they did what they were doing. It was a question calculated to make them feel small and impotent. Furthermore, they were asked in what name they taught. The rulers must have smugly thought that these two men before them would not dare admit their connection with the One who earlier had been sentenced to death by them and actually executed by their Roman overlords. Yet, Peter and John were filled with real power, infinitely greater than that pomposity and malicious caprice which characterized the Sanhedrin. Peter and John spoke with the power promised by the resurrected Jesus and conveyed by the ascended Christ (Acts 1:8).

Wednesday, October 8th - Acts 4: 7-10

From v. 8 onwards we see how dramatically the tables are turned. The poor, uneducated disciples demonstrate that they had received a much more profound education than their religious leaders. The Holy Spirit was bringing to the apostles' remembrance the things they had learned, and they, boldly declaring the truth, thereby put their would-be judges on trial before the throne of God. The Jewish authorities, by their arresting and subjecting to trial Peter and John, thought they would easily snuff out the remnants of the Jesus they hated and thought they had destroyed. Instead, they discover that they have invited into their midst two veritable holy dynamos, who would drive them to conviction, if not conversion, before the heavenly Judge.

Thursday, October 9th - Acts 4: 8

Peter addresses the Sanhedrin with respect due their position, not their persons. He had been taught to make such a distinction by Jesus (Mt. 23:1-3), and the Holy Spirit now

brought to his remembrance that lesson. Jesus had promised His servants such necessary help in their time of need (Lk. 21:12-19; Mk. 13:11). Men filled with the Holy Spirit speak to human judges, however personally corrupt they may be, with respect, not with contempt. They do this not from cringing fear, hoping to receive mercy from their malicious prosecutors, but because they know that ultimately they appeal to the righteous Judge of all, who instituted earthly rulers for His glory. While righteously indicting men, even of high rank, we must never stoop to reviling their God-given office.

Friday, October 10th - Acts 4: 9, 10

Peter, guided by divine wisdom and power, makes clear the absurdity of the charge against them when he points to its occasion, namely, the healing of the lame man. Who but those in the service of the satanic destroyer would construe such a merciful and miraculous blessing as a crime? The apostle had learned from his Master how to portray the blessed works of God in their true colors. When the Jews had sought to stone Jesus, He responded to their threat, saying: I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning me? Peter points up the issue with striking effect: they were on trial for a good work. Neither God nor the godly would charge such goodness as though it were evil. With this simple but profound stroke, Peter unmasks his accusers, revealing wickedness beneath their pious pretensions.

Saturday, October 11th - Acts 4: 9, 10

Peter, having presented the phenomenal and undeniably benevolent aspect of his defense, namely, the lame man's healing--a work clearly done by the mercy and might of God--proceeds to answer the Sanhedrin's question with respect to the source of the good deed. He does this with a boldness, point, and penetration which is astonishingly masterful. Peter shows that he does not fear to proclaim to his judges and to the whole world the heavenly source of his earthly good works. He calls upon them all to hear and to know in what name he stands and serves. Who in his right mind would be ashamed of such a name? It is Jesus (the Savior), Christ (the anointed Messiah), the Nazarene (prophetically foretold in Scripture, cf. Mt. 2:23 and Hebrew root for branch in Is. 11:1). This Jesus received radically different treatment from the hands of these men and from the hand of God. They tried to destroy the Holy Savior whom God vindicated by raising Him from the dead. By the name of this Victor over death, the lame man was raised up from his physical impotence. Faith shows the true magnitude of the person and work of Christ, and vanquishes men's attempts to nullify Jesus by their suppressing the truth about Him.

Sunday, October 12th - Acts 4: 11

Peter drives home the point of how the Jewish rulers were diametrically opposed to God in their estimation and treatment of Jesus. The apostle cites Scripture, which predicts their rejection of Jesus (Ps. 118:22). They, who were in offices designed for the edification of the Church, demonstrated their sinful and criminal incompetence to be builders by their rejection of the living stone who was made by God to be the cornerstone upon which the entire edifice was being erected. That being so, what these men stood upon and built upon, because it was not Christ, was doomed.

Monday, October 13th - Acts 4: 12

The apostle warns the builders who rejected the cornerstone of their folly and danger. He states absolutely that there is salvation in no one or nothing but Jesus. Building does not carry the same urgency as one's being saved. The magnitude of the rulers' sin in rejecting Christ becomes hereby apparent, for as religious leaders they would, in rejecting him, cut off not only themselves from salvation, but all others as well. They would destroy the sole source of salvation which was supplied from the God of heaven. At the same time, Peter's proclamation makes all men accountable to Christ. For it is by the name of Jesus that any person of necessity can be saved.

Tuesday, October 14th - Acts 4: 13

Here we see how the authorities begin to respond to the account Peter and John gave of the hope within them. The members of the Sanhedrin knew that they were exposed and beaten by the sheer cogency of truth. They had tasted such defeat before only at the hands of one other man, namely, Jesus. They would have had painful memories of how Jesus exposed their own guilt when they paraded piously before Him the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8:3ff). They would have remembered how the traps they set for Jesus in the matter of tax payments (Mt. 22:15ff) and questions of the resurrection were turned against them most convincingly (Mt. 22:23ff). They would have remembered the woes Jesus pronounced against them (Mt. 23:13ff), and the masterful way He defended His teaching in the temple when challenged to reveal by what authority He taught (Mt. 21:23-27). The rulers knew repeated defeat at the hands of the holy power of Jesus. Now they were tasting defeat from that same power operative in Christ's followers. Our Jesus neither leaves nor forsakes His disciples amidst their enemies.

Wednesday, October 15th - Acts 4: 14

The healed man confronted the religious rulers with the undeniable effect of the power of the apostles' ministry. The testimony of Peter and John confronted them with the undeniable cause of that power. Once again, the legalistic leaders, who would reject the

grace of God in Christ and hope to stand on the basis of their own puny and putrid righteousness, are speechless in view of the perfect power of the Lord. As the man in the parable without his wedding garment, they had nothing to say.

Thursday, October 16th - Acts 4: 15-17

The fact of a merciful miracle is undeniable, and the gracious heavenly source had been made unarguably clear to these leaders. Yet, rather than accept, rejoice in, and work to spread such good news of salvation to others, they endeavor to contain, if possible, the gospel, as though it were a dreaded disease. They ask: What shall we do with these men? as though they were a pestiferous problem. They should have asked: How shall we do anything except respond to their message with repentance? We see from this how implacably sinners untouched by the grace of God set themselves against the Lord, against His Anointed, against His gospel and servants, and how deserving they are of divine condemnation.

Friday, October 17th - Acts 4: 15-17

How do we know about the reasoning which went on in a closed session of the Sanhedrin? Perhaps Peter and John, though they were dismissed, overheard. But it is not unlikely that we have this intelligence due to some members of the Sanhedrin who were convicted and later converted by what they saw and heard that day. They would have reported, to the glory of God's grace, how the Lord led them out of such blindness and malice into the light and love of Jesus.

Saturday, October 18th - Acts 4: 18

This verse tells of the fruit of the Sanhedrin's discussion, namely, a wicked prohibition against speaking or teaching in Jesus' name. It was an absurdly weak prohibition, too. How did they expect these men to respect and obey something so clearly contrary to the mercy and majesty of God? Note further, that the apostles are not prohibited from performing miracles. Though the miracle of the healed lame man had served to undermine their attack on Peter and John, it was doctrine regarding Jesus which they hated and feared above all. One word from and concerning Jesus sends legions of demons packing!

Sunday, October 19th - Acts 4: 19, 20

The apostles, in response to the wicked and weak prohibition, continue to arraign their judges before the heavenly Judge. It was these leaders, not Peter and John, who had need to change. Peter and John declare their intention and commitment to carry on teaching in Jesus' name. Such action on their part would be reasonable, for it would report what was according to reality which they had experienced. It would also be right for them to publish such good news for the sake of perishing sinners. Finally, it would be a matter of religious devotion for them to speak of the gracious provision of salvation to the glory of God. Their manifold warrant is ours as well to speak to a dying world in Jesus' name.

Monday, October 20th - Acts 4: 21, 22

The rulers threatened the apostles further. How vain the threat was is apparent. When these two men were amidst the gathered height of the rulers' power, being in the veritable jaws of death, and they, like Israel of old, were led by God out of such tyrannical bondage, how could their opponents threaten them further? Yet, even such vain threats can have their effect on the faithless. Think of Israel's cries, soon after they were miraculously released from Egypt and faced the Red Sea, the wilderness, even the promised land. The spiritually exhausted can also be intimidated by vain threats of a defeated enemy. Elijah, after confronting and vanquishing 450 prophets of Baal, ran away when Jezebel threatened him. Even victorious servants of the Lord must perpetually rely on the strength of the Lord. This Peter and John do as they join the prayer meeting in vv. 23ff.

(These notes first were published October 1989)

Tuesday, October 21st - John 6:1,2

The Jews in Jerusalem rejected Jesus as a blasphemer (5:18), despite the impeccable witnesses marshalled in support of His claims. Now we find Jesus back in Galilee, where He had been previously gladly received (4:45). The Galileans not only welcomed Him, but followed Him, due to their having acknowledged at least one of the witnesses Jesus had cited in support of His claims, namely, His works. Those who so follow Christ will not fail to receive blessing from Him, as we shall see. Yet the extent of blessing depends on how and for what reason we follow.

Wednesday, October 22nd - John 6:3,4

As Matthew makes clear, Jesus really wanted a time of solitude on this mountain (Mt. 14:13ff). Yet His compassion would not allow Him to refuse the approach of those seeking help from Him. They came primarily seeking healing (Mt. 14:14), but received teaching, too (Mk. 6:34; Lk. 9:11). Whatever their perceived need, Jesus no doubt centered His teaching on the significance of the Passover, which was at hand. No matter how we approach our Lord or find Him when we approach, He soon leads us to understand that our truest and deepest need is for personal appropriation of the divine means for forgiveness of our sins.

Thursday, October 23rd - John 6:5-13

The greater need we have for forgiveness does not stop Jesus from tending to the lesser need we have for physical food. This miracle of the feeding of 5,000 is recorded in all four Gospels, and thus we should understand that here we have something very significant. Our Lord teaches us to pray, *Give us this day our daily bread*, and from this provision we see that such prayer will not be refused. For these Galileans did not ask for such bread from Jesus; it never occurred to them that He could provide it. But He who provides the greater thing also is willing and able to supply the lesser, especially to those who ask. Our God has power and compassion to give us all things necessary each day (Rom. 8:32).

Friday, October 24th - John 6:5,6

The physical hunger of these 5,000 will provide an opportunity for Jesus to manifest His gracious power of provision. A right assessment of the magnitude of the need helps us more clearly and accurately to assess the magnitude of His blessing. Thus Jesus begins by pointing to the need before them, which clearly overwhelmed Philip, as it would us. Our Redeemer did this not to drive His disciples to despair, but rather to prepare them to appreciate the size and significance of what He was about to do.

When we become acutely conscious of need in our lives, we should not despair, but rather grow strong in faith, anticipating the coming blessed provision of the Lord in magnitude far greater than we ask or think (Rom. 4:18-21).

Saturday, October 25th - John 6:7-9

Notice how inclined even the best men are either to perceive no provision (Philip) or to perceive insufficient provision (Andrew). Of course, without the Lord providing our daily bread such perceptions would be quite accurate. Yet could not these disciples have reckoned that if God had used prophets of old to multiply food (1 Kings 17:8-16; 2 Kings 4:1-7,42-44), they could surely ask their Messiah to do likewise? We should not let our sin-bedimmed natural perceptions blind us to the fact that Jesus is more willing and able to supply our overwhelming need, whatever it may be, than we are to ask Him to do so.

Sunday, October 26th - John 6:10

The synoptic Gospels all tell us that the disciples had urged Jesus to send the crowd away to get their own food (Mt. 14:15; Mk. 6:35,36; Lk. 9:12). Yet Jesus does not send them away, but rather tells them to sit down in preparation to eat. There is trust of a sort in evidence here as the disciples direct this seating and the people cooperate, all without there being nearly enough food in sight.

We do well to note that we never need leave Jesus in order to make provision for ourselves. Nor need we see the provision before we prepare ourselves to receive it. We may sit at His feet, like Mary (Lk. 10:38-42) hanging on every word, being confident that He will give us the one thing necessary, and all lesser necessities as well.

Monday, October 27th - John 6:10

Why does John mention that there was grass in the place where the crowd sat? I believe not only to tell us that it was spring (we gathered that from v.4 which mentions Passover), but also to indicate to us the small detail that Jesus is considerate respecting the bodily comfort of these people. His care for us is most complete. It is most extensive, too, here extending to 5,000 men, besides women and children (Mt. 14:21). Their number was accurately ascertained due to their having sat in groups (Mk. 6:39,40), but such organization also facilitated the distribution of food. Jesus does not minister to a mob, but takes steps to form us into a comfortable, organized company, where the needs of each individual may be met in harmonious concert with those of others.

Tuesday, October 28th - John 6:11

Jesus took the loaves from the lad (v.9), who no doubt freely gave them, and gave thanks to His Father, not only for the food received, but for the anticipated multiplication of that food. Matthew says Jesus broke the bread and gave it to His disciples to distribute (Mt. 14:19). Some have supposed that by such breaking, one loaf became not two halves, but two whole loaves. The truth is that we do not know precisely how this multiplication took place, but we are in no doubt regarding its abundant sufficiency. Each person ate all he wanted. Jesus can multiply our slender resources to provide for all legitimate needs.

Wednesday, October 29th - John 6:12,13

Our Lord has a care, not only for people, but also for the provision He makes for them. He is not wasteful, and would not have us to be so. Much good can be accomplished with left-over fragments of time, talent, and treasure. Here Jesus not only fed more than 5,000 people until they were filled, but He had provided so richly that the left-overs were many times greater in quantity than what they had been at the outset. Who received these left-overs? Did the lad have his gift returned many times enriched? The point is that for all concerned Jesus provides in abundance, being no man's debtor, but rather being the redeeming benefactor of all who follow Him.

Thursday, October 30th - John 6:14,15

Despite the compassionate and abundant exercise of the providing power of our Lord, the people who were fed drew the wrong significance from this sign. They would have Him to be an earthly king, overcoming by His power the curse on the earth which made bread and all material things scarce commodities (Gen. 3:17-19). Yet the earth was cursed due to man's sin. That deeper curse was the one Jesus came to remove, and He would do so despite the misdirected urgings of the people.

We must not reject Jesus as did the Jews at Jerusalem. But neither should we accept Him in a wrong way, as did these Galileans who thought that making Him their political king would be for His glory and their good. We must accept Jesus as He is in fact, which we know by how He presents Himself to us in the Word. Self-fabricated messiahs do not save us.

Friday, October 31st - John 6:15

Jesus sought not only solitude, but solitude with His Father. Matthew tells us that Jesus spent this time in prayer (Mt. 14:23). What form did His prayers take? Surely there was adoration and thanksgiving for the provision of loaves and fish. No doubt Jesus prayed for wisdom and strength to carry on in His taking the high road of self-sacrifice as opposed to the carnal way of the crowd. He must have interceded for His disciples, too. The Holy Spirit shows us here that what we see of the wisdom, compassion, and efficacious power of Jesus in public is sustained by private prayer. Do we realize how vital solitude of this sort is to our service?

Saturday, November 1st - John 6:16-18

The disciples went to cross the sea under the orders of Jesus (Mt. 14:22). Think of the vast change these orders occasioned in their circumstances. They were made to leave a miraculous picnic, and a crowd willing to make their Master king (and possibly His disciples would serve in His court). They encountered instead a dark, stormy night on a rough sea. Sometimes our Lord leads us into such dark, dangerous storms for reasons He knows to be not only sufficient, but good and necessary. There we may feel quite lonely in our feeble struggles, but we should be most encouraged by the words in these verses *...Jesus had not yet come to them*. For He will never leave us alone. If we do not sense His presence now, He will yet come to us in marvelous ways. What a blessed world of difference that little word, *yet*, makes.

Sunday, November 2nd - John 6:19

The disciples had managed to get just over half way across the stormy sea. They were having a difficult time, and yet their lives do not seem to have been in apparent danger, as they were during the crossing when Jesus was asleep in the boat (Mk. 4:35-41). Yet Jesus comes to their assistance in a most marvelous way, revealing in His coming a new aspect of His saving might. However, the disciples, far from perceiving the compassion and a new dimension of their Master's power, see only cause for fright. They feared when He slept in the boat; they feared more when He walked to them on the stormy sea. We are all slow to learn that when Jesus draws near, no matter how He does it, we do not have cause to fear, but rather to rejoice.

Monday, November 3rd - John 6:19,20

Notice how quick we are to expect evil rather than good in our lives. The Son of God draws near in a miraculous manner, demonstrating that no obstacle can separate us from Him and His loving, saving power. But we are prone to misconstrue His coming, expecting something worse than the storms we are currently battling. Though His ways can and do frighten us, Jesus does not capitulate to our fears by staying away from us. He rather continues to draw near, revealing Himself to us and vanquishing our fears. Grace teaches us to expect His coming to us with such loving power, to replace our fears with His peace.

Tuesday, November 4th - John 6:21

Notice that when the disciples welcomed Jesus into the boat, the trial quickly ended, the obstacle of the stormy sea being almost immediately negotiated. In our obedience to the Lord, though storms may arise to assault and oppose us, He will draw near to enable us. We need not fear encountering such storms, for in them we not only learn much about our weakness, but much more about His saving, enabling strength.

Wednesday, November 5th - John 6:22-26

The crowds gradually realize that Jesus was no longer in the area where He had fed them. They perceive no means whereby He could have crossed the sea to reach Capernaum, yet they set out to look for Him there. It would seem that they had greater faith than did the disciples, the crowds at least reckoning that Jesus must have crossed, even if by miraculous means. Yet carnal credulity, while it may appear to be a high form of faith, is in fact not faith at all. The crowds simply wanted bread, and were willing to believe in the miraculous power of Jesus to provide it and other wonderful things. But they were not truly grateful to God as v.23 hints, nor did they see the true significance of the feeding. Fixation with the gift is infinitely different from faith in the Giver.

Thursday, November 6th - John 6:26,27

We must never doubt that Jesus could and did, and still can and does work miracles. But such miracles we must never think of as ends in themselves. They are like signs, pointing to a greater reality; like candy, sweet to enjoy but not substantial enough to live on. The Bible always puts such miraculous manifestations in a subservient place. It is wonderful that Jesus fed 5,000. But those people hungered again the next day. It is stupendous that He walked on water to assist His disciples, but the miracle itself helped only in that one night, being never repeated. In themselves, such deeds of power are great, but taken as signs they point to something infinitely greater. The greatest deed of all, the death of Jesus, looked quite awful and weak compared to these deeds. Yet the effects of that work touch and transform a countless multitude for all eternity. Let us seek this greater gift always.

Friday, November 7th - John 6:27

The Jews worked hard to make their living, and they were likely willing to work hard and sacrifice much to throw off the dominion of Rome, following Jesus as their political king. Men remain like that in our day, being overly concerned with their physical lot in this world. Yet Jesus would ever have us look deeper into our need, the need to be released from the dominion of sin, and higher to the abundant provision of God,

the gift of His Son as an atoning sacrifice for sin. The cost of such redemption is infinite, but our God has borne it, and thus gives it to His people as a free gift of grace. See Isaiah 55:1-3, and Hebrews 11:16 also.

Saturday, November 8th - John 6:27-29

Though Jesus makes it clear that the precious food which endures to eternal life is a gift from the Son of Man, the crowds refuse to think in terms of anything but work which they can and must do. Yet the only work we can do is believingly to accept the divine gift, and even the ability to do that *work* is part of that gift (Eph. 2:8,9). Man is too feeble, finite, and fallen to work the works of God. Praise God that He has done this magnificent work for all who believe.

Sunday, November 9th - John 6:30,31

The crowds, having eaten the miraculous provision of Jesus on the previous day, now demand a sign, as though the prior picnic had never taken place. See how quickly miracle fixation self-destructs, resolving itself into the most utter darkness and confusion. The natural man would see in order to believe. Yet while he is surrounded by the sights (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19,20), he mistakes his own blindness for the lack of clear divine manifestation. Yet with eyes of faith we not only see wonderful things in His Word (Ps. 119:18), we also partake of His wonderful work (Eph. 1:15-23).

Monday, November 10th - John 6:32-36

Here Jesus is endeavoring to raise the focus of the people--much as He had done in the case of the Samaritan woman in ch. 4--not only to a higher form of bread, but also to the One who is the source and giver of it. For a moment the people seem desirous of having such bread (v.34). But when Jesus discloses that He is Himself the bread of life, unbelief refuses to credit the claim or appropriate the benefit. Here is willing blindness, which, having seen a glimpse of Christ's deity and compassion in the previous day's feeding, determines not to act on what it has seen, or to trust and obey the Lord so as to see more. Such adamant sin is a terrible bondage from which we constantly should seek for ourselves and others release.

Tuesday, November 11th - John 6:37

The perverse blindness of this crowd is astonishing. Yet even more astonishing is the fact that some do actually come to Jesus. For we are all by nature dead in sin, unable and unwilling to see the light of God's saving love and power in Christ. What accounts for the coming of some to Jesus? God, by His sovereign grace, brings us to the new birth, draws us to the Savior, and assures us that we are His adopted, beloved children who will never be cast out. Read such passages as Eph. 1:3-6; 2:1-10; Rom. 8:14-17 for further light on this great truth, which, far from being a cause for confusion, should be for us a source of deepest delight and comforting security.

Wednesday, November 12th - John 6:38-40

Once again Jesus informs us that He has come into the world from heaven, under the Father's authority, in order to save those whom the Father has given to Him. It is clear that He came to *accomplish* salvation for those definite ones predestined to it, not merely to make everyone *potentially savable*.. Ephesians 1:3-6 again makes this even more plain. But we must not muse so much over predestination as meditate upon the person of Christ. Think on such expressions as, gives *Me*...come to *Me*...has given *Me*...beholds the *Son*, etc. Only through Him can we begin to glimpse a proper understanding of divine election.

Thursday, November 13th - John 6:39,40

Far from being a cold, confusing doctrine, divine predestination is most warm, personal, and comforting. Verse 40 lays stress on the human response of conversion; while v. 39 shows us that the foundation for

such response is divine grace. Not by our own feeble and variable working are we saved, but rather by the sure, completed work of Christ. *I Myself...* says Jesus, *will raise him up on the last day*. That should comfort us immensely, and empower us in our daily living.

Friday, November 14th - John 6:41,42

The Jews thought they knew Jesus. They thought they knew His origin, His development, and hence the extent of His powers. In fact they were blinded, not by any limitations of His humanity, but by their own fallen limitations. Christ is infinitely bigger and greater than we all realize. We must not think that men's peevish attempts to limit Him to their own finite and fallen dimensions actually will limit Him. All that such attempts do is keep men in the dungeon of their own sin and pettiness. Faith does not balk at His magnificent claims, but rejoices and grows in them.

Saturday, November 15th - John 6:43,44

When we look for light and truth and understanding among ourselves only, we shall only grumble and stumble over the truth. But when God, by His sovereign grace draws us to Jesus, we cease grumbling, and, in love, trust, and obedience, we come to Jesus, finding eternal life in Him. We come because the Father draws. Praise Him that He lifts us from our grumbling to His glory.

Sunday, November 16th - John 6:45

When the natural man hears our words of testimony, or reads the Bible, or even hears, as the Jews then did, the words of Jesus, such a man only perceives the words of men like himself. Yet when the Lord draws us to Himself, He opens our understanding, enabling us to hear through the words of men like Jesus and ministers of His Word, the very words of God. We thus come to know the truth, being taught by the God of truth. 1 John 2:20-27 speaks to this as well.

Monday, November 17th - John 6:46,47

We may *hear* God as He validates the truth in the testimony of godly men. We may *hear* God infallibly as He speaks in His Word. But we cannot *see* God. Only Jesus has such immediate contact with the Father. Yet when we believe in Christ, we enter eternal life, which will culminate in our seeing God. Read Revelation 22:1-5 and rejoice in it!

Tuesday, November 18th - John 6:48-50

Jesus can give eternal life (v. 47) because He is the bread, the source of such life. The Jews think they are asking for a great sign in v. 31. Yet Jesus is before them as the substance of something far greater. Manna fulfills for a day only; Christ for all eternity. And though believers, too, die physically, even in death we live through Christ (Rom. 8:11, 31-39). Death has been destroyed for believers in the death of Christ.

Wednesday, November 19th - John 6:51

Jesus is not only the bread of life (v. 48); He is not only the bread which gives life, eternal life; He is the *living* bread. In other words, He is Himself the divine, infinite and eternal life. He came to communicate that quality of life in Himself to those who not only acknowledge Him, but who consume Him. Strictly speaking, saving faith does not seek bread, or manna, or even eternal life, but Christ, and all these lesser things in Him.

Thursday, November 20th - John 6:51

The first half of v. 51 sums up all that precedes it. The second half progresses to another thought, to a difficult saying (v. 60). Two thoughts are prominent: His flesh (incarnation), and His giving (atoning sacrifice). It is hard to believe that the infinite and eternal God could partake of a human nature; even harder to believe that the main reason He did so was to die. But He did both that we might live eternally in Him. What an infinitely precious and glorious gift is ours!

Sunday, December 21st - Acts 5: 12, 13

From the miraculous judgment imposed upon the hypocrites, Ananias and Sapphira, the Holy Spirit turns our attention to the more positively blessing ministry of the apostles. We should note that while the early disciples were clearly engaged in outreach ministry, they did not neglect their own corporate organization and nurture. We thus read of the Church gathering in Solomon's portico, namely, inside the temple precincts but out in the court of the Gentiles. John Calvin notes regarding these corporate Church gatherings: "...they used to have their meetings in this particular place, for indeed the body of the Church can continue in no other way. For if everyone wished to teach himself and pray privately, all on his own, and there were no common meetings, then no matter how well the Church has been organized, it will inevitably collapse and soon fall into ruins." (*NT Commentaries*, vol. 6, p. 139) .

Monday, December 22nd - Acts 5: 14

Through the exercise of Church discipline, Ananias and Sapphira--one man and one woman--had been removed from the Church. But we learn from this verse that even the diminishment the Church may suffer for her faithfulness bring resulting increase. Many believers were added to the Church. Their quantity is noted by the word, multitudes. Their number must have been great, indeed, for Luke does not record a definite number as he had done earlier with the 3,000 converts (2:41). Perhaps there were too many to count. Their quality is noted by their being designated believers in the Lord. Unlike the purged hypocrites, their hearts were entirely captivated by the grace of God in Christ. Godly reductions beget rich and plentiful fruit.

Tuesday, December 23rd - Acts 5: 14-16

The multitudes of converts were not disappointed in their commitment to the Lord, but, instead, experienced a multitude of cures at the hands of His apostles. They who had been given new life in Christ busied themselves bringing their most needy and afflicted friends, neighbors, and family members to the apostles of Christ. They expected great things even from the least and most fleeting contact with the apostles. Far from their actions being superstitious, they are rewarded with miraculous, divine healings. If our faith were greater, we, too, would bring the worst men into contact with the means of God's grace, and, expecting the greatest results, would receive them in accordance with our faith.

Wednesday, December 24th - Acts 5: 14-16

Surely these verses record an answer to the earlier prayer (4:30) above what was in that prayer asked or thought. Peter is made by the Lord a minister of life and death. His word was instrumental in killing Ananias and Sapphira, yet his shadow brings healing to the sick. The Lord makes His servants to be men to be loved or feared, but never ignored. This is so because Christ Himself is a great divider of men, being a savor of life to some, death to others. No one can be indifferent towards Christ and His servants, for Christ ultimately either gives people eternal, glorious life or condemns them to eternal torment.

Thursday, December 25th - Acts 5: 14-16

What may at first appear to us as superstition in these verses, upon closer examination is seen to be a massive manifestation of most commendable faith in the Lord. Like the centurion, who knew that a mere word from Jesus was sufficient (Mt. 8:5-13), like the woman with the flow of blood, who reckoned that a mere touch of Jesus' garment would heal her (Mt. 9:20-22), and like the Canaanite woman, who counted a

mere crumb from Christ's table to be sufficient (Mt. 15: 21-28), these people are, by their faith, enabled to expect the most from the Lord through the least of His means. How can sickness or demonic possession keep their grip on the lives of those seeking the shelter of the Most High by their abiding in the Shadow of the Almighty (Ps. 91:1)?

Friday, December 26th - Acts 5: 17, 18

Not everyone was favorably disposed toward the miraculously beneficent ministry of the apostles. The Jewish leaders, being filled with unholy zeal, rose up to do more than threaten Peter and John, as they had earlier done (4:18,29). All of the apostles were apparently arrested and thrown into jail. This was the second attempt these religious leaders had made to imprison the gospel of Christ and His ministering servants. Evil men persevere in their opposition to the Lord, His work, and His workers. When we serve most faithfully and fruitfully we do well to stand ready to endure renewed assaults from the wicked.

Saturday, December 27th - Acts 5: 17, 18

We may wonder why the power of God, operative through the apostles, which healed sickness and cast out demons did not subdue the malice of these religious leaders. It was not that the Lord was unable to subdue these wicked men, as later in Acts, by the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, will be made evident. Rather, we should understand here the radical difference the merciful grace of God makes. In one case (vv. 14-16) the mere shadow of the servant of Christ effects healings and exorcisms; in the other, the very bodies of the servants of the Lord are seized and cast into prison. But for the grace of God we would all be like the high priest and his associates, namely, however exalted in religious profession and position, in heart maliciously suicidal, seeking to destroy the instruments, and if possible, the very source of life, health, and peace. Thus these religious leaders show themselves to be in the grip of sinful blindness and death, a veritable prison far worse than that into which they threw the apostles.

Sunday, December 28th - Acts 5: 19, 20

Those who stand for Christ will find Christ standing for them. Hence, we read of the apostles' quick and miraculous release from jail. This time they were set free, not as a result of the fears and political maneuvering of the Jewish leaders (4:16, 17), but rather due to the direct intervention of the Lord, who dispatched one of His holy angels to restore His servants to that freedom which accorded with both their personal redemption from sin's bondage and their calling to be Christ's witnesses throughout the world. Those whom the Son of God has set free, no man can imprison.

Monday, December 29th - Acts 5: 19, 20

The apostles are set free, not only so that they might personally enjoy their liberty, but to the higher end that they might exercise their ministry of declaring the life-giving and soul-delivering message of salvation in Christ. The angelic commission is emphatic, specific, and full of significance. The apostles are to go their way, which is the way of the Lord and the way of true freedom; they are to take their stand in the temple, the house of God, not rot away in a prison; they are to preach to the people, not argue with the religious leaders; and they are, most importantly, to declare the whole counsel of God, which transforms dead sinners into living sons of God. Our freedom in Christ, likewise protected by ministering angels (Heb. 1:13,14), should be used for the similarly high and holy purpose of spreading the gospel.

Tuesday, December 30th - Acts 5: 21-23

The apostles do not hesitate in their fulfilling the angelic commission. At the earliest possible time they are in their assigned place doing their duty. Meanwhile, the mindless machinery of the religious leaders continues to turn as though the apostles were yet bound and in their power. The wicked do not know until too late that the servants of Christ can never be held in their malicious maw, but must ever be about the business of their heavenly Father.

Wednesday, December 31st - Acts 5: 24, 25

The apostles were not only delivered from their enemies. More important than what they had been delivered from is what they had been delivered for, namely, that they might stand in the temple and preach the whole counsel of God. By this we learn that the hands of the zealous persecutors of the apostles are no match for the delivering arm of the Lord, and, further, that strength of the Lord is exerted to the primary end that His Word be declared by His servants. Thus the apostles were reported to be not languishing in the jail where their persecutors had put them, but standing and teaching the liberating truth of God, in accordance with the directions of their angelic deliverer. It is clear for all with eyes to see that the Lord was in complete control of the situation. Yet, sin makes men blind to the most obvious realities, as the following verses indicate.

Thursday, January 1st - Acts 5: 26

So blind are these Jewish leaders to the hand and will of God that they seek again to arrest those whom the power of the Lord had set free. Yet they who will neither see nor fear the Lord cower before the threats of men. They do not attempt to force the apostles to accompany them, for they feared that the people, who had been blessed by the teaching of the apostles, would rise up to stone their persecutors. Such stoning would have represented, in its strictest construction, the capital punishment imposed upon blasphemers--a punishment those opposing the Lord's apostles well deserved. Thus, we see a practical demonstration of how far these leaders were from having their authority recognized by the people. Yet, the apostles, graciously to spare their persecutors and to prevent a riot, willingly accompany the captain and his officers. Accordingly, the apostles went as free men to face their persecutors, not as captive criminals to face just judges.

Friday, January 2nd - Acts 5: 27, 28

The apostles neither fled as cowardly criminals, nor resisted arrest as lawless rebels, but they went willingly to the Sanhedrin to testify again to their trust in and allegiance to Jesus. The high priest charges the apostles with contumacy, or defiance of the court's authority, in that the apostles had disobeyed an injunction prohibiting them from teaching in the name of Jesus. The apostles had previously given open notice of intention to continue their teaching (4:19,20). The high priest charges them with carrying out their intention. His charge reeks with misrepresentation and contempt. He refers to Jesus merely by the phrase, *in this name*, and he complains of the apostles filling Jerusalem with their teaching, when, in fact, they had filled the city with converts to Christ. Finally, the high priest accuses them of wishing to place responsibility for the death of Jesus on the Sanhedrin. In this the high priest and his associates betray a guilty conscience coloring their perception of the apostles' teaching. True, Peter had earlier placed responsibility for Jesus' death on the Jews (4:12-16), but he graciously added that they all--people and rulers--had acted in ignorance (4:17). Such gracious concession, far from bringing the blood of Jesus on the heads of these men, allowed them opportunity to re-examine the motives which had prompted them to cry at the cross, *His blood be on us and on our children*, (Mt. 27:25), repenting and finding forgiveness through His blood.

Saturday, January 3rd - Acts 5: 29

The apostles re-iterate in more pointed and emphatic form what had been declared in 4:19,20. There the two apostles said that they could not stop speaking what they had seen and heard. Here they raise the issue to one of their obedience to legitimate authority. The construction of the original Greek in this verse makes clear that what the apostles do is a matter of universal obligation: *It is necessary to obey God rather than men*. In other words, what the apostles were doing was incumbent upon all men, including the high priest and his associates. The word translated, *to obey* (peiqarcein), denotes submission to the authority of rulers, rather than simply heeding what is heard from whatever source (uJpakouvw). Thus the apostles declare themselves to be not only protected by the superior power of God, but so protected because they willingly placed themselves under the supreme authority of God.

Sunday, January 4th - Acts 5: 30

When those submit themselves to the authority of God, who are by the providence of the Lord placed in positions of ruling over others, there is no antithesis between our obeying God and such men. However, these wicked leaders were far from obeying God, as the apostles make clear by their declaring the great difference between how those leaders had treated Jesus and how God had treated Him. The leaders had put Jesus to death. Here the apostles explicitly charge their judges with the crime from which their intransigence removed all possible mitigation of ignorance (4:17). The leaders had not only injured Jesus by death, but had insulted Him by imposing the most shameful form of death, crucifixion, upon Him. Yet, for all of their malicious abuse of authority, God had raised Jesus up. Death was not able to stifle the power of Jesus, nor could the unjustly shameful form of execution destroy the glorious honor and authority of Jesus. These wicked leaders, as demonstrated by their opposition to Jesus, were in defiance of supremely legitimate and prevailing authority. For one to obey them would be both criminal and sinful.

Monday, January 5th - Acts 5: 31

The apostles indicted their would-be judges in v. 30. The conviction of those judges deepens in this verse; and yet, they too receive the gospel offer of salvation. The power of God is shown to be superior to the power of wicked men when the apostles declare that God raised Jesus by His right hand and to His right hand (th dexia aujtou could be translated instrumentally or locatively). They further declare that such resurrection and ascension inaugurated Christ's reign as Ruler (ajrchgovn) and Savior. In other words, the godly rule to which the apostles submitted themselves was one not only of supreme power and authority, but also of gracious salvation from sin and sin's consequences. Thus even these wicked enemies of Christ and of His apostles are implicitly invited to repent and receive forgiveness of sins through Jesus, the only Savior and Lord. The Jewish rulers could only convict unjustly and kill; the rule of Jesus righteously convicts, graciously grants repentance and forgiveness, thus making dead men live.

Tuesday, January 6th - Acts 5: 32

The apostles conclude their defense, which is really a declaration of the gospel, by declaring themselves to be eye-witnesses to the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Their testimony was corroborated by the Holy Spirit of God, whose undeniable and benevolent power had been demonstrated in the tongues (2:4ff), the healings (3:6ff; 5:14-16), the bold testimony (4:8ff), miraculous deliverance from jail (5:19), effectual preaching (2:37ff; 3:12ff; 4:8ff), other signs and wonders (5:12), and effectual discipline (5:1-11) all manifested through the apostles. Their submission to and divinely directed and empowered service for the only Lord and Savior was undeniable.

Wednesday, January 7th - Acts 5: 33

In response to the faithful testimony of the apostles--testimony respecting the saving work of God in Christ and inviting sinners to salvation in Him--the rulers are convicted, but not converted. They who reject the offer of eternal life in Jesus and refuse to obey the Lord of life, determine to kill the servants of the only Savior and Lord. Their response shows us the fearfully irrational, monstrously murderous, and ultimately suicidal nature of sin. We also glimpse why it is right and necessary that such men who refuse to repent of their sin must be condemned to an eternity in hell. Thanks be to God that we have been graciously delivered from such awful, dominating and damning power!

Thursday, January 8th - Acts 5: 33-39

This passage recounts the famous counsel of Gamaliel, which is often admired for its apparent wisdom. Yet it is impossible for us to know whether the learned Pharisee spoke simply from habit of his well known moderation and habitual avoidance of rash and dangerous actions, or from a degree of contradiction aimed at the Sadducees, who forwarded the proposal to kill the apostles (v.17), or from genuine qualms of conscience, which led him to respect the apostles, if not suspect that they might be testifying to the truth.

The important thing for us to note is how God overruled the murderous intention of the Sanhedrin by the words of one of the most prominent members of that body. The Lord can and does raise up instruments, if not allies, for the preservation of His people even among their most ardent enemies.

Friday, January 9th - Acts 5: 34

Gamaliel was a man of considerable endowments and attainments. He was a Pharisee and a teacher of the Law of God. By his learning and moderate spirit he had earned the respect of the general population as well as of the Sanhedrin. He stood up and asked to have the apostles excused. Thus we may wonder how we have the account of his speech. Perhaps Gamaliel himself was converted to Christ. Perhaps the report came from one of his students, Saul of Tarsus (22:3), who, when he encountered the true wisdom and power of God in Christ, counted the worldly wisdom of such as Gamaliel to be as rubbish (Phil. 3:3-8).

Saturday, January 10th - Acts 5: 35-39

Essentially, Gamaliel's counsel calls for caution and what would seem to be patience. The call for caution and the exercise of true patience is a wise one for many situations. If one is uncertain about an undertaking, he should wait until the picture, or his understanding thereof, clears. A wise and practical maximum is: When in doubt, don't.

Sunday, January 11th - Acts 5: 35-39

Upon closer consideration we should see how worldly, and therefore unwise, Gamaliel's counsel really is. He cites two historical cases wherein false leaders arose and were put down by the Romans. But neither of those cases cited resemble even slightly the situation with the apostles of Christ. The evidence pertaining to Christ and His apostles was so abundant and clear that for any to be in doubt argues not ambiguity in the apostolic testimony but a suppression of the truth in the minds of those doubting. The only similarity between the cases cited and that at hand was that the Romans put to death the principals in all cases. In sum, Gamaliel does not counsel the exercise of Godly patience so much as he gives shrewd advice for the Sanhedrin to wait and once again let the Romans do their dirty work for them.

Monday, January 12th - Acts 5: 38, 39

Gamaliel's counsel was not original. Zeresh, the wife of wicked Haman, said much the same thing centuries before (Esth. 6:13). It is not wise counsel which tells men that the testimony of God is unclear, and that one's salvation may be found in one's staying away from the servants of Christ. The issue regarding Jesus, whom the apostles proclaimed, is too clear for doubt. The empty tomb of Jesus, the inability of the Sanhedrin or the Romans to produce the body of Jesus, the boldness and cogency of the apostles, as well as the miraculous power accompanying their ministry--all were evidences demanding a verdict. This counsel of inaction in the light of such evidence is tantamount to advising one to take the course of the wicked, lazy, one talent man, whose highest aim was simply to steer clear of God (Mt. 25:14-30). The apostles should have been punished as wicked deceivers or they should have been followed, with submission rendered to their teaching, worship rendered to the Jesus they proclaimed, and honor rendered to them for their office and faithful service therein. When Jesus tells us that the one who is not for Him is against Him, any counsel of neutrality is not only a myth, it is a mortal sin.

Tuesday, January 13th - Acts 5: 40

The counsel of Gamaliel may not have been truly wise, but it sufficed to dissuade the Sanhedrin from their murderous intention. Thus we see how God sinlessly uses even the sinful ignorance of men to serve for the preservation of His people. The apostles are saved from death, but not from suffering. Surely the God who saved them from the greater evil could have delivered them from the lesser as well. But the sovereign wisdom of our Lord causes all things, even the suffering of His servants, to work together for His glory and their own good.

Wednesday, January 14th - Acts 5: 40, 41

Pain and ignominy are universally considered bitter afflictions. Such bitterness the apostles are now compelled to taste. Yet, far from complaining, they rejoice. This they did not because they were stoically indifferent to the stripes they received and the more injurious humiliation heaped on their characters. But to their suffering something has been added to transform the bitterness into sweetness. As when Moses threw the tree into the bitter waters of Marah, thus sweetening them (Ex. 15:22-25), so here the apostles' bitter sufferings are sweetened as they rightly reckon themselves to be sharing in the fellowship of Christ's suffering on the cross. When believers suffer for Christ's sake, they may be viewed by the world as cursed, but in the eyes of the Lord they are blessed. For as the death Christ endured was the most unjust, ignominious, and painful punishment, which wrought the most glorious triumph, so those in Christ who are called to share in the fellowship of His sufferings ought to count their shame and pain more productive of glory than all of the successes and triumphs of the world (Mt. 5:11,12; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Pet. 4:12-14).

Thursday, January 15th - Acts 5: 42

Not only do the nations and rulers devise vain things against the Lord (Ps. 2:1-3), but their plots, threats, and punishments against the servants of the Lord likewise prove vain. Therefore, we see that the threats and blows of the wicked do not hinder the ministry of the apostles, but instead act as spurs to drive them to greater and more extensive endeavor for Christ. The apostles teach and preach Christ, instructing from the Word and exhorting their hearers to receive and rest upon Jesus as the Christ; they do so not only in the temple, but carry the gospel into the homes of the people; and so they publish the glad and glorious tidings of redemption each and every day. That which the wicked rulers would have them never do at all, they do at all times, in all places, and with all people. Jesus is not Lord of nothing, as these rulers would make Him; He is Lord of all, as His servants by word and deed declare Him to be.

Friday, January 16th - Acts 6: 1-3

Here begins a new section in the Book of Acts. We shall be told how the opposition to the gospel intensifies into deadly persecution. However, even the persecution will lead to the expansion of the Church. Two main characters, in addition to the apostles who have thus far been the main focus, will also be introduced, namely, Stephen and Philip. These men were deacons, the creation of whose office we learn of in general in the sixth chapter, and whose particular activities are narrated in ch. 7 (Stephen) and ch. 8 (Philip). The more the world opposes the Church, the more the Church grows in quality and quantity.

Saturday, January 17th - Acts 6: 1

In addition to challenges from outside of the Church, we are told of challenges arising from within the Church itself. In ch. 5 it was Ananias and Sapphira, hypocritical professors, whose discipline led to no decrease, but rather to increase of Church membership. Now, due to redoubled apostolic labors (5:42), the Church was expanding greatly and rapidly. This blessing of Church growth generated its own internal challenge. Whenever a congregation grows--especially when it grows rapidly--a potential problem arises as the body becomes too large for detailed attention to be given its members by the first echelon of leaders. Thus, there is danger that the members will be dealt with perfunctorily or neglected. This can happen when homogeneous growth occurs, but, as we learn from this verse, the growth in the early Church was not homogeneous. The Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews and those considering themselves pure Jews, who were at odds with each other out of the Church, carried their tensions over into the Church, to the point where the Hellenistic widows were apparently suffering neglect in the ministry of practical mercy. Growth in Church membership calls for growth in leadership personnel and organization. Where God grants the former, we shall find Him also granting the latter.

Sunday, January 18th - Acts 6: 1-3

Why did not the Holy Spirit instruct the apostles to anticipate this Church growth problem and make provision for it? For one thing, the apostles were not called or equipped to fashion the edifice of the Church so much as to lay its foundation (Eph. 2:20). Thus they rightly resist the impulse to reduce their teaching in order to administrate. But further, it may be observed that when actual, legitimate needs arise in the Church, actual resources are found already at hand to meet those needs. The men for this job were already in the Church and were recognizable by the body when the need arose, not before. The modern methods of goal-setting, vision adopting, and so-called faith challenging, whereby the ministerial structure of a church is set up in anticipation of its growth, find no place in the biblical paradigms of Church growth.